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A Feminist Study of Men's and Women's Experiences of Workplace Bullying and Sexual Harassment

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Summary

This thesis addresses both the discourse and dynamics of workplace sexual harassment and bullying, and on this basis develops an analysis of the relationship between these discourses, a topic which has hitherto been unexamined. My analysis builds upon a review of literature on workplace sexual harassment and bullying from 1979 to 1997. The emergence of the workplace bullying discourse in UK trade union publications, the media and self-help texts is traced. Empirical data based on interviews is used to explore three themes: (i) the characters of the workplace sexual harassment and bullying discourses; (ii) men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment; and (iii) how both the workplace bullying and sexual harassment of men and women is underpinned by gender prejudice.

My main data source is sixty men's and women's accounts of cross-sex or same-sex workplace bullying and/or sexual harassment in professional/managerial and subordinate jobs, produced in fifty qualitative, in-depth interviews and ten questionnaires.

I show that many women embrace the workplace sexual harassment discourse to condemn unwanted male sexual conduct and many workers deploy the workplace bullying discourse to problematise a range of experiences previously understood as parts of the social relations of work. My data reveals that workplace bullying is often a campaign in which allegations of poor work performance are used to encourage an unwanted employee to resign and/or to set him or her up for dismissal. I demonstrate that the workplace sexual harassment and bullying of men and women is gendered: men are sexually harassed when they fail to conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity and men and women are bullied by line managers because they do not appear to conform to normatively defined gender roles.

My argument is that while men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment might be conceptualised together as examples of 'abuse of power', the specificities of workplace sexual harassment and bullying must remain visible. As such, I propose conceptualising men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment as a continuum to highlight the similarities and differences between these experiences.

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Declaration

The section entitled 'Gender and interviewing' in Chapter 2 has been published as 'Interviewing men: Vulnerabilities and dilemmas' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 20, 4, 553-564.

Abbreviations

BIFU - Banking, Insurance and Finance Union
EPOC - Equal Pay and Opportunities Campaign
GMB - General, Municipal and Boilermakers (Trade Union)
IPD - Institute of Personnel and Development
IPMS - Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists (Trade Union)
MSF - Manufacturing, Science and Finance (Trade Union)
NALGO - National Association of Local Government Officers (now UNISON)
NASUWT - National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NATFHE - National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NCCL - National Council for Civil Liberties
NUT - National Union of Teachers
TUC - Trades Union Congress
USDAW - Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis addresses both the discourse and dynamics of workplace sexual harassment and bullying, and on this basis seeks to develop an analysis of the relationship between these discourses, a topic which has hitherto been unexamined. My analysis builds upon an extensive review of literature on workplace sexual harassment and bullying from 1979 to 1997. The recent emergence of the workplace bullying discourse in trade union publications, the media and self-help psychology/social issues texts is traced. Empirical data based on interviews is used to explore three themes: (i) the characters of the workplace sexual harassment and bullying discourses; (ii) men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment; and (iii) how both the workplace bullying and sexual harassment of men and women is underpinned by gender prejudice.

My main data source is sixty men's and women's accounts of cross-sex or same-sex workplace bullying and/or sexual harassment in professional/managerial and subordinate jobs, produced in fifty qualitative, semi-structured interviews and ten questionnaires.

As will be demonstrated in this chapter, previous studies of workplace bullying and sexual harassment do not fit neatly into any intellectual tradition: workplace bullying has been taken up by self-help psychology/social issues writers (e.g. Adams, 1992) and trade unions

(e.g. MSF, 1994); while sexual harassment has been explored, for example, by feminist sociologists (e.g. Wise and Stanley, 1987), lawyers (e.g. MacKinnon, 1979) and advice workers (e.g. Collier, 1995). I am writing as a feminist based in interdisciplinary women's studies. As such, I have developed my conceptualisation of my research topic within the tradition of feminist analyses of social relations, rather than within other traditions of social research and theorising, such as organisational studies or industrial sociology, though I have drawn on substantive studies from these traditions where appropriate.

In this first chapter, in order to locate my research in relation to previous studies, I begin by reviewing existing analyses of sexual harassment and bullying at work. This review highlights a number of research questions which researchers have either not yet asked or which they have posed but not fully answered, a number of which I will be exploring in this study. The argument of the thesis will then be outlined. I conclude by explaining how the thesis is organised.

Literature review

The literature in which the issues of workplace sexual harassment and bullying have been explored includes women's studies, men's studies, sociology, history, law and social issues/psychology. This review is selective rather than exhaustive: I have sought to include texts which are particularly influential or which represent a particular perspective. My research analyses harassment in paid work and the majority of the women and men I

interviewed were white, heterosexual and did not mention disabilities (see Chapter 2), but I have incorporated a review of literature on everyday harassment (e.g. street harassment), racism, anti-lesbian harassment, anti-gay harassment and disablism in this chapter in an attempt to contextualise the limitations as well as the scope of my own material. For as Maynard (1994:24) observes, in her discussion of feminist research, theoretical knowledge can address some of the silences in our empirical work.

My literature review looks first at sexual harassment and then workplace bullying. I begin with an outline of the identification of sexual harassment and discuss the earliest feminist theorisations of sexual harassment. Next, I explore a field of research which I categorise as the ‘rethinking sexual harassment’ debate: this debate entails critical reflections upon the sexual harassment discourse - for example, feminist theorisations of sexual harassment. Men and masculinities literature on male victimisation is the subject of the following section. Then, I assess self-help texts which introduce and explore bullying at work. I conclude with an analysis of how workplace harassment researchers have begun to interpret the similarities and differences between sexual harassment and bullying at work. The order of this section is intended to identify the influences on the development of the workplace sexual harassment and bullying discourses from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. I stress, though, that the developments I present are not strictly chronological in date as new positions do not necessarily supersede their predecessors but instead often co-exist alongside them, with both new and established positions continuing to offer important insights.

The identification of sexual harassment

This section outlines the initial conceptualisation of sexual harassment by feminists and key substantive findings regarding its extent, severity and meaning.

Historical analyses demonstrate that women workers have always encountered unwanted male sexual conduct. Lambertz (1985), in a study of trade union disputes in English cotton mills in the 1880s, analyses incidents which would now be understood as 'sexual harassment' (see also the examples cited by Hadjifotiou, 1983:7 and Collier, 1995:1-2). The incidents show an interplay between male power and employment relations which, as I discuss below, is present in contemporary sexual harassment cases. Lambertz reports, for example, that the parents of young women tenters complained that a male head carder used his position for 'improper purpose' when he assaulted two young women tenters. Though the women said that they had struggled with him, they were wary of screaming lest the head carder should sack them. At the subsequent investigation, the head carder's defence counsel discredited the female complainants by calling them sexually precocious and willing partners. He claimed that the head carder was guilty of 'marlocking' (flirting) rather than 'improprieties' (Lambertz, 1985:33).

Though women workers have, therefore, always encountered unwanted male sexual conduct, the interpretation of such experiences as 'sexual harassment' only finally took

place in the late 1970s. As Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:1) explain in their introduction to a recent collection of feminist perspectives on sexual harassment, sexual violence in the form of prostitution, rape and child sexual abuse were key targets of first wave feminism at the turn of the century and with the rise of second wave feminism in the 1970s, the identification of date rape and sexual harassment grew out of and extended these concepts.

The term and interpretation 'sexual harassment' was coined by radical feminists in the US (e.g. MacKinnon, 1979; Backhouse and Cohen, 1979; Farley, 1980) in order to problematise women's experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct in the workplace. In her pioneering legal analysis, MacKinnon (1979) identified two broad types of sexual harassment at work: 'condition of work' (also now known as 'hostile environment' and, in Canada, 'chilly climate') and 'quid pro quo' sexual harassment. She explained that in condition of work sexual harassment, a woman may be constantly felt or pinched, visually undressed and stared at, surreptitiously kissed, commented upon, manipulated into being found alone, and generally taken advantage of at work - but never promised or denied anything explicitly connected with her job (MacKinnon, 1979:40). In contrast, quid pro quo sexual harassment at work is defined by a more or less explicit exchange: the woman must comply sexually or forfeit an employment benefit: for example, MacKinnon reports that a woman who declined to join her employer in his bed while on a business trip was reminded at lunch the next day that she was soon to be reviewed for reappointment, that her chances depended largely upon his support and recommendation, and that she would

be well served if she linked both her professional work and her personal life more closely with his own needs. She did not do so and subsequently she was not renewed (MacKinnon, 1979:34). While 'quid pro quo' and 'condition of work' constitute two broad types of sexual harassment, MacKinnon was concerned to stress that the threat of loss of work explicit in the quid pro quo sexual harassment may be only implicit in condition of work sexual harassment without being any less coercive (MacKinnon, 1979:40). This naming of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment was a very important development for women workers. For while women had always talked amongst themselves about unwanted male sexual conduct, the interpretation 'sexual harassment' had now publicly established the unacceptability of men conceptualising women workers as sexual objects.

As a result of influential feminist activism and research in the US in the late 1970s, 'sexual harassment' migrated first to Canada and Australia (Hadjifotiou, 1983:2) and then to the UK in approximately 1981 (Wise and Stanley, 1987:29). Subsequently, 'sexual harassment' has gained world-wide currency. Wirth (1997:136), in an international overview of sexual harassment at work, reports, for example, that a 1988 study commissioned by the Government of the Netherlands found that an overall 58 per cent of women working in a small business, a large municipality and an industrial company had experienced workplace sexual harassment. A government survey in Japan in 1993 showed that 26 per cent of working women in Tokyo had suffered at least one unpleasant sexual experience at work in the past two years. Wirth explains that until recently most surveys

had been conducted in industrialised countries. However, she reports that a few surveys carried out in developing countries are now revealing similar statistics to those produced in industrialised countries: for example, in Tanzania a survey of 10,319 women in 135 workplaces found that sexual harassment was a common problem affecting women workers (Wirth, 1997:136).

Wise and Stanley (1987:30-31), in their analysis of sexual harassment in everyday life, explain how sexual harassment became established as a significant issue in the UK. They report that NALGO carried out surveys of sexual harassment in local government in London and Liverpool. I suggest that this trade union interest in unwanted male sexual conduct at work marked an important development in trade union approaches to women members. For previously, as Hadjifotiou (1983:70-75) explains, trade unions had not problematised sexism against women, colluding instead with male members' sexist practices. The Liverpool NALGO survey revealing the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace attracted considerable media attention. For example, in October 1981 a television documentary (*TV Eye*) on workplace sexual harassment, made with the help of NALGO, was broadcast. Subsequently, EPOC presented guidelines on workplace sexual harassment at the annual conference of the Institute of Personnel Managers. NCCL published a pamphlet on workplace sexual harassment in 1982 (all cited in Wise and Stanley, 1987:30-31). These events allowed women workers in the UK to begin to conceptualise their experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct as 'sexual harassment' and thus as conduct which is incontrovertibly unacceptable because it undermines the

status of women as workers. Though recent commentators such as Thomas and Kitzinger (1997) would argue otherwise (see below), this thesis will contend that the interpretation of unwanted male sexual conduct as 'sexual harassment' remains very relevant to many women workers in the 1990s.

'Sexual harassment' has, however, always been a contentious subject. Wise and Stanley (1987) explain that the NALGO, NCCL and EPOC activities and publications described above were reported by the English press in a generally straightforward and sympathetic fashion. Yet Wise and Stanley say that workplace sexual harassment was also beginning to be re-interpreted, initially in local newspapers, as the conduct of the 'office Romeo'. Though the office Romeo was depicted as over-sexed and also misplaced in his attentions, he was presented as a man engaging in normal male responses to sexually attractive women (Wise and Stanley, 1987:32). The press insisted that conduct which feminists and trade unionists were increasingly perceiving as 'sexual harassment' was 'fun' not 'harassment'. The *Sun*, for example, observed that, 'while serious minded union officials...are getting their knickers in a twist about sexual harassment at work, the workers themselves say "Carry on groping" ... "it makes the day more pleasant"...'(22 March 1982. Cited in Wise and Stanley, 1987:34).

One reason why the concept of sexual harassment was available for undermining in this way by salacious British tabloid press reporting in the 1980s was the way in which sexual harassment was then frequently presented as 'sexual' conduct. MacKinnon (1979), in the

ground-breaking analysis referred to above, conceptualised workplace sexual harassment as conduct in which men use power in order to gain sex. This theorisation of sexual harassment was clearly underpinned by MacKinnon's identification of quid pro quo sexual harassment. For in quid pro quo sexual harassment a woman must comply sexually or forfeit an employment benefit (MacKinnon, 1979).

A strong critique of the theorisation of sexual harassment as conduct in which men use power to gain sex was subsequently made in the late 1980s by Wise and Stanley (1987). In direct contrast to MacKinnon's argument, Wise and Stanley perceive sexual harassment as conduct in which men use sex in order to maintain power. This conceptualisation is underpinned by Wise and Stanley's (1987:94) assertion that, 'sexual harassment can be described as "sexual" only in the sense that one sex, male does it to another sex, female'. They see sexual harassment as not necessarily 'sexual' behaviour, but rather, 'any and all unwanted and intrusive behaviour of whatever kind which men force on women (or boys on girls, or men on girls, or boys on women)' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:8). Although this latter argument is not yet commonly accepted (see below), the argument that men use sex in order to maintain power has now been widely adopted by feminists. For example, Stanko (1988) has analysed the sexual harassment of women and its implications for thinking about segregation in employment. Stanko says that women's traditional employment spheres, largely composed of care-giving and service jobs, contribute to promoting the sexualisation of women in those positions. Waitresses, for example, might find that their own sexuality and/or personal attractiveness is part of the expected service

and therefore part of the job requirements (Stanko, 1988:95. See also Adkins, 1995). Stanko concludes that, 'being female, in women's work, may in fact be a "set-up" for harassment' (Stanko, 1988:95) - although there is a slight chance that women may find safety in numbers or at least some sanctuary among female co-workers (Stanko, 1988:95). Stanko (1988:97) says that male working culture, particularly within employment spheres primarily dominated by men, supports and to some extent may promote the sexualisation of women who may also be their fellow workers in order to build and sustain male solidarity. Women who enter into men's territory are assumed to expect and accept these displays of healthy male heterosexuality (Stanko, 1988:97. See also Yount, 1991). Stanko's intervention exemplifies a wider body of work which draws out the varying forms taken by sexual harassment in particular employment contexts.

Feminist analyses have, therefore, demonstrated the sheer implausibility of the press re-classification of sexual harassment as either 'unisex' or fun. Most sexual harassers are men and the overwhelming majority of workplace sexual harassment victims are women: according to the Industrial Society Survey (1993), for example, just over half of working women experience sexual harassment, while fewer than 7 per cent of respondents to this survey were sexually harassed men (cited in Collier, 1995:9). Women report that sexual harassment at work has devastating effects: for example, anxiety, tension, irritability, depression, deterioration of personal relationships, hostility, inability to concentrate, sleeplessness, fatigue and headaches (Rubenstein, 1992 cited by Collier, 1995:14). Furthermore, Stanko (1988:92) has explained that the form of sexual intrusion is often

immaterial: women are sometimes greatly distressed by persistent low-level harassment - leering, for example - and exhibit stress symptoms similar to women who have experiences of sexual and physical assault.

As such, the sex discriminatory nature of sexual harassment has been recognised in the legal discourse established in the UK as a result of 1970s liberal feminist activism against women's inequality. Section 1(1) of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) holds that a person discriminates against a woman if, 'on the grounds of her sex he treats her less favourably than he treats or would treat a man' (Collier, 1995:43). The first victory in a sexual harassment case was brought under this legislation in 1985. Aeberhard-Hodges (1996:518-519), in an international overview of recent judicial and arbitral trends in sexual harassment cases, reports that in this case, *Porcelli v. Strathclyde Regional Council*, the Employment Appeals Tribunal decided that the aspects of male co-workers conduct towards a woman laboratory technician which had sexual overtones (jokes, innuendoes, remarks and gestures of a sexual nature) 'could have no relevance in their conduct towards a man' and found that the woman had suffered job-related detriment by being forced to seek a transfer from the school at which she worked. Subsequently, as Aeberhard-Hodges (1996:519) reports, significant developments have been made in judicial interpretations of sexual harassment at work in the UK. 1990 was a 'breakthrough year' (Aeberhard-Hodges, 1996:519): for example, in *Bracebridge Engineering Ltd. v. Darby*, the Employment Appeals Tribunal held that a single incident, if sufficiently serious, is enough under the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and in the course of employment to

constitute a violation; and in *James v. Eastleigh Borough Council*, the House of Lords established that a discriminatory motive or intention is not necessary for finding unlawful discrimination, i.e. the argument that, 'I did not mean any harm' could be rebuked by reference to the impact that the behaviour had on the victim.

Alternatively, the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act (1978) may be used to complain of sexual harassment at work. Under section 55(2)(c) an employee may find that sexual harassment at work constitutes a breach of contract and choose to resign without notice and claim constructive dismissal. Under section 57, an employee could claim unfair dismissal if an employer terminated their employment because they refused to comply with sexual demands or complained about sexual harassment (Collier, 1995:50). Although the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) has not yet been used as a remedy for workplace sexual harassment, sexual harassment is now beginning to be accepted as a major health hazard, so this Act (which says that the employer has a statutory duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees at work) could now be used to complain of sexual harassment (Collier, 1995:50).

The financial implications to organisations of women resorting to the legal remedies described above and subsequently winning their industrial tribunal cases are stressed in practical texts advising organisations how to combat sexual harassment (e.g. Collier, 1995). Collier (1995:14) reports, for instance, that in 1992 the London Borough of Islington paid £15,000 in a settlement of a sexual harassment case brought by a female

trainee painter. As sexual harassment also causes disrupted work, reductions in productivity and quality of work, demoralised staff and financial loss related to increased turnover of staff, Collier (1995:14) argues that sexual harassment is 'bad for business' and says that 'preventive measures are cheaper'. As such, Collier's (1995) text is important in offering much helpful advice to organisations in developing sexual harassment policies and implementing sexual harassment training.

Rethinking sexual harassment

Although the starting point for the rethinking sexual harassment debate is a recognition that the sexual harassment discourse is a success story for late twentieth century feminism because, as demonstrated above, it has attracted attention and support and effected considerable political and social change (Brant and Too, 1994:1), in the 1990s many feminists have been drawn to reflecting critically upon the sexual harassment discourse.

One reason for this re-assessment of the sexual harassment discourse is a realisation of the threat of the anti-feminist backlash. Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:6) report, for example, that students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology burned copies of the booklet *Dealing with Harassment at MIT*, which they described as a total abrogation of free expression. Indeed, a radical challenge to the theorisation of sexual harassment as unacceptable conduct has been presented by some writers within an increasingly heterogeneous feminist debate. In a text on feminism and sexuality, Roiphe (1994) - who

Thomas and Kitzinger define as an anti-feminist backlash spokesperson - seeks to reconceptualise sexual harassment as sexual interaction. This does not mean that she agrees with MacKinnon (1979) that men use power to gain sex. Instead, Roiphe argues that to find reciprocated sexual attention, women and men have to give and receive a certain amount of unwanted sexual attention (Roiphe, 1994:87). She feels that rules and laws based on the premise that all women need protection from all men, because they are so much weaker, serve only to reinforce the image of women as powerless (Roiphe, 1994:89-90). Roiphe reports that a female teaching assistant at a US university was offended by the sexually harassing content of a male student's essay and argues that the idea that a male subordinate can sexually harass a female superior, overturning social and institutional hierarchy, solely on the basis of some primal or socially conditioned male power over women is insulting (Roiphe, 1994:89). She proposes that instead of learning that men have no right to do terrible things to women, women should be learning how to deal with such incidents with strength and confidence (Roiphe, 1994:101).

These anti-feminist backlash arguments have explicitly prompted a number of feminists to make a careful restatement of the dynamics of power and resistance in gender relations. Brant and Too (1994:6), for example, observe that whilst many feminists might agree that a culture of dependency should be avoided, Roiphe's line of argument is an oversimplification which assumes that for feminists the right to say 'no' to undesired sexual initiatives means an unwillingness to say 'yes' to desired sexual activity. Kelly et al (1996), in an analysis of the meaning of sexual victimisation, are particularly critical of

Roiphe's (1994) analysis of sexual harassment because they say that Roiphe has reworked the ideology of coercive heterosexuality in men's favour. This demonstrates that many feminists find Roiphe's analysis simplistic. However, many feminists do still remain concerned by the threat posed by the anti-feminist backlash. For example, this provides one rationale for Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997) collection of contemporary feminist perspectives on sexual harassment.

The second rationale for Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997) book is that although a key achievement of second wave feminism was to single out sexual harassment as a part of women's personal everyday experience and to give it a political definition and name, they feel that many women and men have never accepted the feminist interpretation of women's experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment (see also Brant and Too, 1994). As such, in Part I of their book, four contributors - Herbert; Nicolson; Mott and Condor; and Cairns - analyse the ways in which women are apparently, 'refusing the label, declining to protest' (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:19). While Thomas and Kitzinger (1997) feel that women reject the interpretation 'sexual harassment' because they are reluctant to identify themselves with a 'feminist' issue during an anti-feminist backlash, the other contributors develop a somewhat more diverse cluster of arguments. Thus, Herbert (1997) argues that women workers and students do not label sexual harassment as sexual harassment because they are ignorant and confused about what counts as sexual harassment. Nicolson (1997) believes that women doctors learn not to be concerned by sexual harassment in the process of developing an occupational

identity. Mott and Condor (1997) say that the sexual harassment of women secretaries is so routine that it becomes invisible and that naming such everyday forms of sexualisation as sexual harassment may become a cause of pain for those women who achieve a sense of self-worth through the 'good' performance of the secretarial role. Cairns (1997) argues that women have accommodated to male-defined norms of femininity and have consequently developed a very circumscribed sense of personal agency: as such, they may not believe that their experiences are 'real' or may think that they are in the wrong.

The topic of women's non-labelling of sexual harassment seems to be becoming increasingly popular in contemporary analyses of sexual harassment. For example Monson (1997), in an edited collection focusing on 'everyday sexism' (Ronai et al, 1997), draws from observational data to show that while white women shop assistants in the US encounter regular insults and repeated requests for unwanted dates from their white male customers, the frequency of these experiences and their perpetration by customers rather than employers leads the women to label them as 'ordinary inconveniences rather than personal or social injustices' (Monson, 1997:143). This is illuminating, yet as I have argued elsewhere (Lee, 1997d), the conclusion Monson draws: 'defining sexually harassing behaviour as normal undermines efforts to prevent it' (Monson, 1997:149), worryingly both denies women's right to define male behaviour in whatever ways they think most appropriate and suggests that only the label 'sexual harassment' - rather than, for example, 'everyday rudeness' - can precipitate efforts to prevent oppression. Though I agree that encouraging more women to define unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual

harassment is a valid project, this thesis will argue that emphasising women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment is unnecessarily pessimistic. Many women do interpret unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment and even when women do not do so they may still conceptualise unwanted male sexual conduct as unacceptable. As such, my argument will be that the existence of a range of terms for unwanted male sexual conduct - for example, 'everyday rudeness' - rather than just one term - 'sexual harassment' - might enable more women to recognise and perhaps challenge unwelcome experiences.

This argument will extend the important insights made by Epstein (1996) in her analysis of 'hetero/sexist harassment' and the enforcement of heterosexuality. Epstein makes an argument which - at first glance - has less radical implications than Wise and Stanley's (1987:4) assertion that sexual harassment includes all 'male behaviour forced on women' (see above), but which actually contributes very significantly to the important project of making visible and unacceptable the minutiae of men's oppression of women. Epstein thinks that the word 'sexual' in 'sexual harassment' obscures the experience of 'sexist harassment' which is not overtly or obviously sexual in content or form. To illustrate the implications of this, Epstein describes the experiences of Rebecca, a lesbian on a temporary contract in a university department. A senior colleague, William, would frequently invade Rebecca's space, but his touches could not really be said to be 'sexual'. Instead, she perceived them more as an infantilising process - they would occur if she disagreed with him and he would touch her in a way that indicated that he found her

immature, not to be taken seriously. Rebecca did not make a formal complaint against William because she felt that in the course of a disciplinary hearing she would have to agree that the touches she had endured while being harassed were not specifically 'sexual'. At no time had William made 'sexual advances' to Rebecca. As Epstein observes, it is difficult to define harassment as 'sexual' when, in common-sense terms, it is not. She says, therefore, that the term 'sexist harassment' is a useful way of making visible a form of unwanted male conduct towards women which is currently not always visible in common-sense understandings of 'sexual harassment'. As indicated above, however, I will show in this research that 'sexual harassment' and 'sexist harassment' need not be conceptualised as the only ways in which to highlight the unacceptability of unwanted male sexual or sexist conduct.

This interest in developing varied interpretations of unwanted male conduct is underpinned by the recent concern to extend the range of experiences that count as 'harassment'. Kitlinger (1994), in an analysis of anti-lesbian harassment, makes very significant contributions to this project. She says that the word 'harassment' suggests a discrete incident, or a series of such incidents, directed at the person who is being harassed (name-calling, assault, vandalism). It less obviously refers simply to an offensive milieu. Thus, it still sounds implausible for a lesbian woman to say that she is 'harassed' by having to live in a society where heterosexuality is flaunted (e.g. church wedding bells; het couples walking unselfconsciously down the street entwined in each other's arms). She also observes that 'harassment' sounds like something that 'happens'. It is quite hard to

interpret the word to mean silences, absences and evasions (e.g. when a lesbian woman is not dismissed from her job because she stayed in the closet).

While Kitzinger (1994) highlights anti-lesbian harassment, the relationship between sexual harassment and the wider institution of heterosexuality has been placed on the sexual harassment research agenda by Epstein (1996). She argues that sexual harassment is a key way through which heterosexuality is institutionalised. Epstein says that in order to develop a fuller understanding of unwanted sexual conduct, this needs to be seen within the context of what Rich (1980) calls 'compulsory heterosexuality' - i.e. the ways in which heterosexuality is rewarded (for example through social approval) while lesbianism and gay sexuality is punished (for example through social stigmatisation) (Epstein, 1997:155). Epstein (1997:165-166) argues that the options open to women in response to sexual harassment are limited in ways which tend to reinforce heterosexuality: for example, if women adopt styles and behaviours which try to avoid harassment through being quiet and 'well-behaved', this can seem to signify a particular kind of heterosexual femininity in which women are seen to be passive, waiting for men's attentions.

Another way in which earlier conceptions of harassment have been challenged is by exploring the implications of racism and ethnicity. For example, the exclusion of 'race' in much feminist and social science sexual harassment research is Chen's (1997) starting point for her discussion of Asian-American college women's experiences of sexual harassment. Chen argues that the role of 'race' and the qualitatively different experiences

of women of colour has been ignored by researchers because sexual harassment has been conceptualised solely as a problem resulting from gender hierarchies, with little attention to how racial hierarchies interact simultaneously with gender systems. The little attention given to the sexual harassment experiences of women of colour has focused on African-American women. Chen argues, however, that though Asian-American women - as women of colour - share similar experiences with African-American women, they nevertheless have distinct experiences. Sixty-nine per cent of Chen's questionnaire informants (women undergraduates) felt that Asian-American women experience sexual harassment differently from Anglo-American women. This is because, underpinned by US military dominance and occupation in Asian countries (which included sexual exploitation over Asian women in desperate economic conditions), non-Asian men misperceive Asian-American women as 'exotic', 'submissive', 'passive', 'docile', 'man-serving' and 'easy prey' (Chen, 1997:55).

These articles by Kitzinger, Epstein and Chen are illustrative of a recent concern to address the multiplicity of women's identities in analyses of harassment. Analyses which focus specifically on disabled women's experiences are, however, still in short supply. Morris (1996:2), in her introduction to a collection of articles on feminism and disability, is concerned to stress that disabled women need to find a way to make their experiences visible and share them with non-disabled people, in a way that - while drawing attention to the difficulties in disabled women's lives - does not undermine disabled women's wish to assert their self-worth. Though her analysis is not explicitly framed as a discussion of

harassment, Keith's (1996) contribution to this collection offers much evidence of the harassment of disabled women by non-disabled men and women, clearly highlighting the unacceptability of non-sexual unwanted conduct (which will be explored further below when I discuss workplace bullying). Keith explains that strangers perceive disabled women as powerless, passive and unattractive and as such feel that they can ask invasive personal questions - e.g. 'what did you do to yourself then?' and 'do you get depressed a lot?' (Keith, 1996:76). She argues that:

A detailed examination of what is meant by the smiles, the patronising gestures, the questions, the stares, the rudeness and the rejection should not just be dismissed as the stuff of apolitical individualism or relegated to psychological studies. An analysis of these apparently minor, but actually very significant events in the lives of disabled people, what they mean and what effects they have on us, is part of the political progress disabled people are making (Keith, 1996:75).

So far in this section, I have demonstrated the ways in which feminist contributors to the rethinking sexual harassment debate have uncovered women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct at work as sexual harassment and have begun to include the multiplicity of women's identities in analyses of harassment. Another equally important aspect of the debate is a recognition that sexual harassment takes place in many different contexts, not just in paid employment. This is not an easy project because, as Brant and Too (1994:1) explain, the workplace origin of the sexual harassment discourse is still so influential that it is difficult to apply the term 'sexual harassment' to situations which take

place at home, for example. Though this is a criticism of the sexual harassment discourse, I would argue that it is important to remember that early sexual harassment researchers and activists did not conceptualise sexual harassment as purely a workplace problem. Instead, while they felt that the unequal power relationship between men and women was particularly apparent in the workplace given men's more powerful organisational positions (Hadjifotiou, 1983:24), they did acknowledge that, 'behaviour at work is, in fact, similar to that elsewhere. Women are frequently whistled and shouted at in the street, manhandled in buses and trains, chatted up in pubs and sexually abused in their own homes' (Hadjifotiou, 1983:23). I acknowledge, however, that subsequently many sexual harassment activists and researchers have indeed focused exclusively on workplace sexual harassment at the expense of sexual harassment in everyday life (e.g. at home and in the street). Wise and Stanley's (1987) analysis was an important early exception. However, their conceptualisation of non-sexual conduct as 'sexual harassment' weakened their argument. As noted above, Epstein (1996) has rightly argued that it is difficult to define harassment as 'sexual' when in common-sense terms, it is not.

A more recent analysis of sexual harassment in a non-work context is, however, more plausible in demonstrating the 'sexual' nature of the unwanted male conduct encountered. Larkin (1997) explores street harassment in Canada. She conducted interviews and focus groups with over fifty young women and asked them to write personal journals of their everyday experiences of sexual harassment. The women reported encountering street harassment in the form of whistles, catcalls, horn-honking, flashing, demeaning gestures

and vulgar propositions from adolescent and adult males (Larkin, 1997:124). Larkin (1997:121) argues that these examples of street harassment are part of a system of sexual terrorism that reminds young women of their vulnerability to more extreme forms of abuse (e.g. rape). While Larkin (1997:116) stresses that she does not seek to criticise the efforts of those who have worked relentlessly to eliminate sexual harassment at work (indeed she says that she has been personally involved in such campaigns), she is extremely critical of the view that sexual harassment occurs mainly in paid work and academia. She argues that:

It would seem that the tendency to view sexual harassment as a problem that occurs primarily in the workplace and/or academic setting has the effect of minimising its occurrence in other aspects of women's lives. Considering that street harassment may be women's most common experience of males' intrusive and intimidating behaviour, this is a serious omission. ... [Street harassment] is such an inevitable part of girls' passage into womanhood that many young women are emotionally worn down long before they ever enter the workplace or academia. ... unless we expand our focus to include the pervasive forms of harassment that curtail women's ability ever to develop a sense of security and self-assurance in the larger world, it is unlikely that women will have the confidence to confront the abusive and demeaning behaviour in settings where our employment or educational goals are at risk (Larkin, 1997:116).

The interventions into the rethinking sexual harassment debate which I have described above have analysed the sexual harassment of lesbian women, Asian-American women,

disabled women, women at home and women in the street. While Epstein (1996) has analysed the harassment of gay men and men perceived to be gay/effeminate (see below), heterosexual men as the victims of harassment are conspicuous by their absence in the rethinking sexual harassment debate. An analysis of men and masculinities is, therefore, the subject of the next section.

Men and masculinities

Although men do not appear as victims in most sexual harassment research, men are present as victimisers in all sexual harassment research. These men, however, are usually presented without an analysis of their motivations for engaging in sexual harassment. Thomas (1997), in a psychosocial exploration of the cultural context of sexual harassment, explains why a more detailed consideration of male sexual harassers has remained largely absent from sexual harassment research. She says that feminists have long been insistent that the harasser's motivation and intentions should be irrelevant when it comes to deciding whether or not a given incident constitutes harassment - and that it is the recipient's subjective experience of feeling harassed that should define whether or not the incident 'counts' as sexual harassment. From a feminist standpoint it might therefore be argued that studying the reasons why men harass women is not only unimportant, but politically inappropriate, since it provides them with an opportunity to make excuses for their behaviour (Thomas, 1997:132).

While explanations/excuses are indeed irrelevant to the right of women to define an experience as sexual harassment, motives are nevertheless analytically interesting. This has been demonstrated by Watson's (1994) ground-breaking study of men accused of sexual harassment. In this research, Watson compares these men's accounts with the accounts of women who have encountered sexual harassment. Women who had made an accusation of sexual harassment did not explain the behaviour they had encountered in relation to any single causal factor but they stressed that the sexual harassment was not associated with sexual attraction. In contrast, the premise of all the explanations offered by accused men was that the accusation was a simple misunderstanding and breakdown of communication with the accuser concerning a potential or actual sexual relationship. The men argued that false accusations of sexual harassment occur because modern relationships between men and women are complicated. The allegation was made as a consequence of imperfect signals being imperfectly received. These are assertions which are likely to be endorsed by Roiphe (1994) because she argues that to find reciprocated sexual attention, you have to give and receive a certain amount of unwanted sexual attention (Roiphe, 1994:87). Watson's analysis of the accused men's explanations, however, clearly demonstrates the validity of Kelly et al's (1996) criticism that Roiphe has reworked the ideology of coercive heterosexuality in men's favour (see above). For Watson argues that the men's focus on sexual attraction acts as a red herring. If the alleged harasser had to abandon the explanation of sex he would have to consider the relevance of power-sharing, male dominance and hegemonic control mechanisms in the workplace. It would be necessary to face the implications of men's sustained command of the public arena on the one hand,

and of their management of dominant ideology on the other. Watson argues that the accused men's explanations effectively naturalise patriarchy through the red herring of sex. However, while Watson's article represents a significant advance in sexual harassment research because she has placed harassers as well as harassees at centre stage, she has not given her male interviewees a very sympathetic portrayal. This does not mean that I would privilege the men's explanations for their conduct. I merely want to register the point that there *may* be men who are wrongly accused of sexual harassment.

Thomas's (1997) psychosocial exploration of the cultural context of sexual harassment, however, is more charitable towards male sexual harassers. Thomas argues that by looking more closely at the psychosocial construction of masculine identities in our society, it is possible to see how 'doing power' over women may for some men represent an important part of forming and maintaining a masculine identity. Hence, much of the everyday sexual harassment that women experience may be seen as a manifestation of the psychosocial pressures on men to identify with a form of 'masculinity' premised upon misogyny (Thomas, 1997:135). Thomas (1997:149-150) makes an important argument which suggests that women's experiences of male-perpetrated sexual harassment may one day come to an end:

As men begin to recognise the damage that this constant pressure inflicts on them, they may start to realise that conformity to norms of masculinity predicated upon misogyny not only perpetuates fear among men but also engenders a climate of mistrust and mutual antagonism between men and women, which - in the long run - benefits nobody. In this

way, by acknowledging the coercive and corrosive aspects of patriarchal power that they themselves experience, men may at last be in a position to understand that rejecting the patriarchal imperative could in fact be liberating for all. Only then, when men themselves start to resist hegemonic masculinity, will there be any real likelihood of progress towards eliminating sexual harassment.

These studies by Watson (1994) and Thomas (1997) demonstrate that men are beginning to enter onto the sexual harassment research agenda - albeit only as perpetrators of sexual harassment against women. As indicated above, though, men's experiences of being the victims of sexual harassment remain absent from almost all sexual harassment research. This is because most feminists conceptualise sexual harassment as male oppression of women. Cockburn (1991:57-58), for example, states that male power and male sexuality are linked. Indeed power itself is eroticised and power is male. Herbert (1992) argues that men cannot be sexually harassed because harassment can take place only if the harasser has both institutional and personal power over the victim. Wise and Stanley (1987) implicitly deny that men may encounter sexual harassment when they define sexual harassment as 'male behaviour forced on women' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:4). This non-recognition of men's sexual harassment experiences is one consequence of the way in which 'patriarchy' has been theorised by many feminists as male oppression of women (e.g. Walby, 1989).

By contrast, of course, popular media discourse has foregrounded the possibility of female harassment of men. In particular, the sexual harassment of a man by a woman has recently

been explored by Crichton (1994) in the book and film *Disclosure*. Feminists have been critical of this book/film. For example, Brant and Too (1994:14-15) point out that this plot might be defended as a liberal desire to be fair in acknowledging that individuals of either sex may harass. They argue, however, that *Disclosure* 'pretends that men and women operate on a terrain which is neutral rather than one contoured by inequalities' (Brant and Too, 1994:14). They also point out that the simplistic reversal does not illuminate how sex and power operate together in harassment and does not extend representations of harassment beyond the conventionally heterosexual. They say that this shuts down possibilities of recognising and analysing harassment on grounds of other sexual orientations, women's harassment of women and men's harassment of men. I do not, however, think that such media portrayals can achieve this, and neither should they be allowed to. At the same time, I wish to suggest that, as explained above, the recognition and analysis of men's experiences of sexual harassment by men or women have also been shut down from a rather different direction, namely by the conceptualisations adopted by most feminist writers. This is not universal, of course, for Stanko (1988) prefaces her analysis of women's experiences of sexual harassment with the comment that:

While I will be focusing on sexual harassment of women by men within assumptions of heterosexuality, I do not mean to ignore nor belittle the experiences of women and men who may experience sexual harassment from other women and/or men, heterosexual or homosexual. I do, however, wish to use sexual harassment as another example of how male domination locates itself in *women's* everyday lives (Stanko, 1988:94 italics in original).

As indicated above, such an explicit statement that heterosexual and gay men *can* be sexually harassed by heterosexual and gay/lesbian women and men is highly unusual in feminist research, even though Stanko does not go on to offer an analysis of their experiences. More common is an assertion exemplified by Thomas (1997) who simply observes that, 'in spite of the publicity given to the sexual harassment of men by women by the controversial novel (Crichton, 1994) and film (1994) *Disclosure*, it is still generally accepted that male harassment of women is more prevalent than the reverse' (Thomas, 1997:131). This statement positions statistical prevalence as the only criterion which establishes whether or not a type of workplace harassment is worth analysing. In this thesis, I will not be seeking to challenge the statistical prevalence or political importance of the male perpetrator/female victim model of workplace sexual harassment, but I will contend that men encounter sexual harassment and that this is analytically illuminating.

My argument that men can encounter sexual harassment perpetrated by women is underpinned by the IPD survey of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment by women, which was carried out in 1995. That this survey was even conducted represents a significant development in the workplace sexual harassment debate. The IPD conducted 400 telephone interviews, largely with professional staff (49 per cent of whom were women). It was found that 7 per cent (an equal number of men and women) were aware of men being sexually harassed by women in their workplace. The survey, which the IPD does not plan to publish, was reported in the *City Centre Newsletter* (1995) under the

heading 'Sexual harassment of men: Is it an issue?'. This is a legitimate question given that the survey draws attention to a previously unresearched type of workplace harassment. Yet, nevertheless, the question underlines feminist discomfort with the suggestion that men may be sexually harassed by women. For there is clearly scope for research which finds that men may be sexually harassed by women to be deployed to wrongly re-conceptualise workplace sexual harassment as a gender-neutral problem underpinned by sexual interest rather than male power over women. This was characteristic of 1980s press coverage of workplace sexual harassment. Wise and Stanley (1987) report that after the press identified the 'office Romeo' (the over-sexed man engaging in normal male responses to a sexual situation) they also unearthed the 'office Juliet' (a mature woman, experienced in sexual goings-on and with an eye for shy, nervous and sexually inexperienced males). Feminist activists have had to work hard to dispel the myth that there are as many 'office Juliets' as 'office Romeos' in UK workplaces.

The IPD survey found that fewer men (25 per cent) than women (42 per cent) were prepared to take legal action against workplace sexual harassment. Fear of publicity was the major factor in this decision for both sexes. Women were, however, twice as likely as men to cite 'fear of what the harasser might do' as a reason for not taking legal action. As the *City Centre Newsletter* observes, this shows that men's experiences of sexual harassment cannot simply be equated with those of women. For women, workplace sexual harassment by men can always ultimately mean rape, this cannot be the case for men being sexually harassed by women (Collier, 1995:9-10). For as Cockburn (1991) has observed,

while a woman may take a fancy and embarrass a man, women very rarely possess the combination of sexual inclination and power that would turn them into harassers of the damaging kind that men are.

The IPD survey's emphasis on men harassed by women indicates that even when the orthodox notion that workplace sexual harassment has a female victim and a male perpetrator is set aside in a survey, workplace sexual harassment remains conceptualised as cross-sex, heterosexual conduct. Epstein (1996) has made a significant challenge to this interpretation, opening up possibilities for feminist analyses of the sexual harassment of men. Epstein's gay male interviewees spoke of being harassed by men because of their sexuality, of harassing other men through a presumption of their gay sexuality (harassment which functioned to define the harasser as heterosexual), as well as harassing women to avoid accusations of homosexuality. Epstein's research does not, however, address whether or not heterosexual men may be sexually harassed by heterosexual men. However, this too is a real possibility. Since the 1980s, men and masculinities have been the subject of analysis in men's studies (e.g. Metcalf and Humphries, 1985; Chapman and Rutherford, 1988; Seidler, 1989; Morgan, 1992). Morgan (1992), for example, briefly reflects upon his own personal experiences of harassment perpetrated by men and concludes that, 'while the harassment of women by men probably remains the quintessential form of this kind of dominance behaviour, it could also take place between men' (Morgan, 1992:196).

Indeed, a study by Holland et al (1990) illustrates the sexual harassment of heterosexual men by heterosexual men - although the men's experiences are not presented as sexual harassment but as ridicule and peer pressure designed to promote hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. Drawing from data produced in the Men, Risk and AIDS project, Holland et al (1990) observe that the dominant cultural ideal of heterosexual masculinity in the UK produces some men as virile, romantic, successful and powerful, but only in relation to other men who are wimps, failed men and sexual flops (Holland et al, 1990:122). Holland et al (1990:128) report that when young men talk amongst themselves about their sexual exploits and experiences, they are struggling to establish themselves as acceptably masculine, within a competitive framework. Young men deploy 'performance stories' to establish themselves as 'real men'. The male peer group can exert pressure and employ ridicule to keep young men on the straight and narrow path towards heterosexual masculinity. Those who fall short in expressing and defining themselves in this way, or whose sexual claims are not believed, are aggressively labelled as 'wimps', 'wallies' and 'wankers' (Holland et al, 1990:132).

This labelling process, then, defines certain heterosexual men as 'not real heterosexual men' i.e. effeminate or gay. Lees (1997:102), drawing from one of the first studies of male rape, observes that male rapists of men stigmatise their victims as gay, soft, cripples or 'not real men'. Victims are rendered effeminate by the attack (Lees, 1997:106). As such, it is pertinent to note Morgan's (1981:99) observation, made in his wider analysis of men and masculinities, that while there are clearly hierarchies between men, fleeting and

temporary, as well as structured and long-lasting, which may be in terms of strength, sexualities, wealth or class, the point is not that these practices and experiences are exactly the same as those between men and women but that they have sufficient similarities for there to be the possibilities of some cautious dialogues. This is a point which, as I reveal below, could usefully have been taken up by researchers of workplace bullying (as women *and* men can be bullied at work). In this section, then, I have suggested that men can encounter victimisation perpetrated by men or women, but I have also argued that a recognition of the gendered character of this victimisation need not threaten feminist emphasis on the more statistically prevalent and threatening male victimisation of women.

Workplace Bullying

This section outlines the initial conceptualisation of workplace bullying by trade unionists and self-help psychology/social issues writers and key substantive findings regarding the extent and severity of workplace bullying. Field (1996), the author of the second UK self-help text on workplace bullying, explicitly states that: 'this book has no academic aspirations' (Field, 1996:xxi). Indeed, at the time of writing there are no published academic analyses of workplace bullying in the UK. Newspaper articles, radio and television programmes and trade union policies and publications, therefore, offer the most information about this newly labelled type of workplace harassment. I will comment further on this material when I present an analysis of the social construction of workplace bullying in Chapter 5. At this point I will therefore focus on three aspects of the workplace

bullying discourse which are particularly significant to the argument I wish to develop in my thesis: i) the emphasis on ‘persistence’ in the workplace bullying discourse; (ii) the proclaimed sex-neutrality of workplace bullying, and iii) the problematic differentiation of workplace bullying from workplace sexual harassment.

The discourses of sexual and racial harassment have clearly played a significant role in the emergence of workplace bullying. Men and women can interpret experiences they conceptualise as ‘workplace bullying’ as unacceptable conduct because the groundwork for this has been set up by the discourses of sexual and racial harassment. These discourses have established not only strong, easily recognisable labels and interpretations for discriminatory experiences, but importantly, have gone some way to establishing the legitimacy of complaining about types of workplace harassment.

Prior to the emergence of the workplace bullying discourse, the central focus of the workplace sexual and racial harassment discourses was on the characteristics of the *person* (e.g. sex or ‘race’) experiencing particular types of *behaviour* (e.g. sexual propositions or racial abuse). Therefore, the common-sense notions that sexual harassment is defined by its sexual nature and racial harassment is defined by its racial nature created what can be viewed as a discriminatory gap in the workplace discrimination discourse. There was no term and interpretation for workplace harassment which the recipient did not immediately perceive to be directly related to an aspect of his/her identity (e.g. his/her sex or ‘race’). One consequence of this was that white, heterosexual men who encountered unfair

allegations of poor work performance found it almost impossible to claim that they had encountered workplace harassment.

The term and interpretation 'workplace bullying' joined 'sexual harassment' on the UK workplace harassment agenda in the early 1990s, nearly twenty years after the emergence of the term and interpretation 'sexual harassment'. Adams (1992), whose analysis was not informed by feminist perspectives, contributed the first UK self-help book on this subject. She drew from interviews with men and women to establish what sorts of experiences count as 'workplace bullying'. The debate about what counts as 'workplace bullying' has not yet attracted the same heated political disagreements as the debate about what counts as 'sexual harassment'. Workplace bullying is now unproblematically understood to involve, for example, setting objectives with impossible deadlines; removing areas of responsibility and giving people menial or trivial tasks to do instead; taking credit for other people's ideas; ignoring or excluding an individual by talking only to a third party to isolate another; withholding information; spreading malicious rumours; constantly undervaluing effort; persistent criticism (MSF, 1994). Subsequently, workplace bullying has been defined as:

Persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions, which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress (MSF, 1995).

As evidenced by the word 'persistent' in this definition, the types of experiences defined by MSF (1994), for example, as workplace bullying must be persistent in order to count as workplace bullying. Indeed, Leymann (1992) (cited in Hoel, 1997) has argued that workplace bullying must be a weekly occurrence over a period of at least six months. As a consequence of this emphasis on persistence, self-help writers have 'focus[ed] on the more serious end of the spectrum [of workplace bullying]' (Field, 1996:xxii). For example, Adams (1992:37-42) reports that a group of university technicians were bullied by a lecturer who removed their responsibilities, excluded them from decision-making, gave them menial tasks to complete and called them derisory nicknames. The university's personnel director observed how badly these bullied workers had been affected:

One was very gaunt, red-eyed and unshaven. ...Another one of them constantly chain-smoked and seemed to have the shakes. A third was pale and withdrawn and seemed very uptight. ...I saw [the bully] as the sort of person who, in wartime, would be taken on as a concentration camp commandant (Adams, 1992:37).

Now, moving on to the theme of sex-neutrality, in the influential analysis of workplace bullying mentioned above, Adams (1992) sought to prove that workplace bullying does not indicate sex discrimination. She cited the case of a woman employee bullied by a male line manager and then observed that a man who had previously worked for the same male line manager had also been bullied by him and eventually resigned because his health was so adversely affected. Adams was concerned to stress, however, that 'as the stories in this book unfold, you will discover that female bullies are no less vitriolic' (Adams, 1992:10-

11). Similarly, a respondent to a survey focusing on the workplace bullying experiences of nurses commented, 'I do not think gender was an issue as this man was bullying male and female staff alike' (McMillan, 1995:43). As a gender analysis is, therefore, explicitly excluded by Adams, she presents the problem as a consequence entirely of abuse of organisational position. However, all social interactions are gendered, so there is little reason to believe that the phenomenon of workplace bullying is different in this respect. I will argue in this thesis that the pertinence of gendered identities and power relations need to be explored in relation to workplace bullying.

The only research which has recently begun to question the gender-neutrality of workplace bullying has been conducted in Scandinavia. Hoel (1997) reports that Björkqvist et al's (1994) study of university employees shows that more women than men had encountered workplace bullying. Hoel also reports that Leymann's (1992) research suggests that the majority of perpetrators are men and while men are predominantly bullied by men, women may be bullied by men or women although they are more frequently bullied by women. Leymann proposes that the reason why women more frequently than men experience workplace bullying by a member of the opposite sex may simply reflect the fact that most managers are men and, therefore, in a position to act out behaviour which is experienced as workplace bullying.

This indicates that workplace bullying is gendered in ways which UK discussions ignore. At the time of writing, however, there is as yet no published work challenging the current

gender-neutral conceptualisation of bullying proposed by Adams. Indeed, this is one intention of my own research project. Morley (1996:469), in a book review, however, has advanced a potential - though rather conspiratorial - argument that workplace bullying is connected to sexual inequality because, 'bullying is often a form of harassment and misogyny used by men who are sophisticated enough not to use overtly sexual tactics to undermine women'. This argument seems to suggest that sexual harassment is blatant and obvious while workplace bullying is subtle and insidious. Many experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying do not conform to these conceptualisations. Nevertheless, the possibility of shifting tactics is worth exploring. As explained above, women can resort to legal remedies against sexual harassment at work. There is as yet no law against workplace bullying (see Chapter 5). One example of shifting tactics can indeed be found in the highly-publicised case of policewoman, Sarah Locker. She was sexually and racially harassed by male co-workers. After she received an apology from the Metropolitan Police, she returned to her job. She was subsequently bullied through the tactics of ostracism and being given trivial tasks to complete. This may suggest, therefore, that when her co-workers realised that they could no longer get away with blatant sexual and racial harassment, they found other ways in which to harass their victim which could not easily be defined as sexism or racism. This offers one possibility why gender and 'race', for example, may often be relevant in workers' experiences of workplace bullying: although a harassing incident may not immediately appear to be sexual or racial, it may indeed be motivated by such prejudices. The examples of workplace bullying given above by MSF

(1994) could, therefore, be interpreted as types of workplace sexual and racial harassment. This is a suggestion which is explored in detail below.

Turning more directly to the complexities and uncertainties in distinguishing workplace bullying and sexual harassment, it is noteworthy that some trade unions have linked campaigning on workplace bullying to their equal opportunities agenda. For example, the IPMS trade union characterise their interest in workplace bullying (they produced a members' guide on harassment and bullying in January 1997) as part of their ongoing work on equal opportunities, which includes the development of policies to ensure fair treatment for everyone at work (Watkins 1997). The IPMS concept of fair treatment for 'everyone' is interesting. Trade unions and researchers can either acknowledge or ignore the fact that 'everyone' has a sex, 'race', sexual orientation, marital status, age, etc. Many previous commentators on workplace bullying are in fact divided on the question of whether or not workplace bullying and sexual/racial harassment should be conceptualised separately or together.

On the one hand, trade unions and researchers are seeking to gain legitimacy for the concept of workplace bullying by closely linking it to discourses of sexual and racial harassment. For example, Norwegian researchers, Einarsen et al (1994) (cited in Hoel, 1997) argue that sexual and racial harassment represent different aspects of the same problem. The GMB, NASUWT and NATFHE all argue that sexual harassment and racial

harassment may be involved in workplace bullying. Field (1996:45) agrees, for in an exhaustive list of workplace bullying behaviours he includes:

...harassment of any kind; ... inappropriate remarks, comments, aspersions, suggestions etc. about a person's gender, race, colour, beliefs, sexual orientation, background, upbringing etc.; jokes of a sexist, racist, ageist of similar nature whose objective is to humiliate.

It is possible to uncover clear similarities between perceptions and responses to workplace bullying and workplace sexual and racial harassment in existing research and trade union documents, though the similarities are not yet made explicit in these contexts. BIFU, for example, says that one example of workplace bullying is, 'excluding colleagues by talking solely to third parties to isolate another' (BIFU 1996:21), yet they also say that 'being frozen out of conversations' can also be an example of racial harassment.

On the other hand, researchers and trade unionists are seeking to differentiate workplace bullying from sexual and racial harassment at work. Adams (1992:10) stresses that, 'although some people will insist otherwise, bullying at work is separate from the recognised problems of sexual harassment or racism'. Confusingly, given his arguments mentioned above, Field (1996:25) agrees with this position. The Swedish researcher, Leymann (1987) and Finnish researchers, Björkqvist et al (1994) (cited in Hoel, 1997) make a distinction between bullying and racial/sexual/age harassment, even though they acknowledge that certain groups may be more vulnerable to becoming victims of

workplace bullying. MSF recognises that workplace bullying may involve sexual harassment etc., but interpret this as evidence that workplace bullying may have ‘elements’ of other forms of harassment, not as evidence that workplace bullying may be intrinsically sexual/racial etc., and thus similar to sexual/racial harassment:

If the bullying has any element of harassment on the grounds of race, creed, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation or sex, the member may face disciplinary action under Rule 16 of the MSF Rule Book (MSF, 1995:22).

Annabel (1997:126) observes that Adams (1992) might have insisted on a distinction between workplace sexual harassment and bullying because, ‘if bullying is treated as a sub-section of sexual or racial harassment it may be given a lower profile’. The GMB document notes that if workplace bullying is to be part of a broad harassment policy, then ‘the policies and procedures should recognise the special nature of sexual and racial harassment. The inclusion of workplace bullying should not make the procedures weaker’ (GMB, 1996:4). Field’s comments (above) seem to suggest that sexual and racial harassment can be perceived as *types* of workplace bullying. This is indeed one way in which sexual and racial harassment might be conceptualised. For sexual harassment, racial harassment and bullying are indeed all forms of intimidation. However, if sexual and racial harassment are defined as *only* types of bullying, this could undermine the specificity and visibility of sexual and racial harassment.

I think that the confusion between workplace bullying and sexual harassment arises because commentators are torn between two distinct positions. One position would allow them to tap existing insights into workplace harassment by linking workplace bullying to the already established discourses of workplace sexual and racial harassment. Though these discourses are established, however, measures to eradicate sexual and racial harassment from organisations often elicit hostility. Indeed, any equal opportunities measures aimed at groups who are perceived to need 'special treatment' - e.g. white women, Black men and women - attract charges of favouritism (Liff and Cameron, 1997). Therefore, making a clear link between workplace bullying and sexual/racial harassment - for instance, by stressing the roles of sex and 'race' in men and women's experiences of workplace bullying - carries a risk that workplace bullying will become contaminated by association and similarly undermined as a manifestation of 'political correctness'. In order to avoid this, commentators can espouse the second position. They can present workplace bullying as an entirely separate problem from workplace sexual and racial harassment. This, however, means that opportunities to draw from existing discourses may well be missed. The outcome of the practical and analytical struggles between the two positions is that currently many commentators are trying to sit on the fence, unsure which way to jump.

The problem of whether to interpret experiences as 'workplace sexual harassment' or 'workplace bullying' can, however, be circumvented by conceptualising all forms of

workplace harassment under the umbrella of 'abuse of power'. Annabel (1997:126) argues against Adams' separation of workplace sexual harassment and bullying because:

The common thread is abuse of power. To quote Chris Ball [of MSF]... 'Why should it really matter what the reason is for the humiliations people suffer at work? ... Harassment and bullying are cut from the same piece of cloth as far as the person on the receiving end is concerned'.

This argument is also made by Price and Black (1997:28-29) in their report of an Equal Opportunities Action Group survey of harassment at Oxford Brookes University. They argue that much harassment is personal and that characteristics such as sex, race, disability or sexuality often provide convenient weapons for attacking an individual, rather than express antagonism towards a group. They define harassment simply and broadly as offensive behaviour of any kind because 'it is not necessary to categorise harassment before attempting to deal with it' (Price and Black, 1997:29). A NASUWT publication labels workplace bullying, harassment on the grounds of 'race', sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, trade unionism, religion and politics as 'personal harassment'. This is an interesting idea. However, while promoting this label on the cover and defining what it means in the text, the document then slips back into referring to 'bullying' and 'harassment' and becomes confused in explaining how to recognise 'personal harassment' (NASUWT, 1996b). This section has, therefore, demonstrated two distinct ways in which to conceptualise workplace sexual harassment and bullying: Adams (1992) argues that workplace bullying and sexual harassment are entirely separate phenomena; and Annabel

(1997), for example, argues that workplace bullying and sexual harassment share the common feature of abuse of power. For my part, while I agree with Annabel that there are interactions between types of harassment, I think that it is important not to conflate types of harassment in a way which obscures their distinctive dynamics. This argument will be more fully developed below, in the section where I state my thesis argument.

Summary

This literature review has identified the influences on the development of the workplace sexual harassment and bullying discourses from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. I have shown that 'sexual harassment' first emerged as an example of male oppression of women as women and subsequently developed into a problem in which the multiplicity of women's identities (e.g. 'race' and sexual orientation) intersect. I have demonstrated how the literature on men and masculinities can be said to complicate research on gender and sexuality by revealing men's position as possible 'victims' (e.g. anti-gay harassment) as well as victimisers. Finally, I have discussed how the 'workplace bullying' discourse either sees aspects of men's and women's identities as irrelevant or only incidental to their experiences of workplace bullying.

A résumé of the thesis argument

This literature review, therefore, raises a range of important issues. In this thesis, the particular research questions which I will address are as follows: is the workplace sexual

harassment discourse still relevant to women workers in the 1990s? In what ways do women workers interpret unwanted male sexual conduct? Can men be sexually harassed by women or men, and if so, what do such experiences reveal about hegemonic masculinity? How do men and women workers conceptualise 'workplace bullying' and what are the workplace dynamics of their experiences of this phenomenon? In what ways might bullying be a gendered experience for men and women workers?

The rest of this thesis seeks to contribute to the debates concerning rethinking sexual harassment, men and masculinities and workplace bullying through an empirical investigation and analytical discussion of these questions. I will analyse the relationship between the workplace bullying discourse which has emerged in the UK in the 1990s and the workplace sexual harassment discourse which has been developing in the UK since the 1980s. Though I will disagree with Thomas and Kitzinger (1997) that the workplace sexual harassment discourse has become less than helpful to women workers, I will argue that the workplace sexual harassment discourse is limited and vulnerable to the anti-feminist backlash they identify for two main reasons. Firstly, as demonstrated by the significant number of analyses which problematise women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment (e.g. Cairns, 1997; Herbert, 1997; Monson, 1997; Mott and Condor, 1997; and Nicolson, 1997), 'sexual harassment' is being defined by many feminists as the *only* way in which to meaningfully interpret unwanted male conduct. Secondly, while the harassment of gay men/men perceived to be gay has been recognised by feminists, heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment

by men or women are being routinely ignored (e.g. Wise and Stanley, 1987; Herbert, 1992) or given cursory mention (e.g. Stanko, 1988; Thomas, 1997) in all feminist sexual harassment research. Though I will agree that the workplace bullying discourse is important in finally offering a strong interpretation for a range of non-sexual experiences which women and men workers had previously understood as inevitable parts of the social relations of work, I will argue that this discourse is limited for two main reasons. Firstly, workplace bullying is presented by most workplace bullying researchers and activists as persistent and very serious. Secondly, the most influential UK analysis of workplace bullying to date (Adams, 1992) has explicitly excluded a gender analysis.

My argument is that rather than constantly re-iterating what women should interpret as sexual harassment (as Herbert (1997) would suggest), feminists must begin to think creatively about how to develop the workplace harassment discourse to take account of the problems workers now encounter. I think that one way in which this can be achieved is through an engagement with the workplace bullying discourse. This does not, of course, mean that I advocate abandoning the insights which sexual harassment researchers have already made or viewing the anti-feminist backlash as completely insurmountable and thus trying to bypass rather than fight against it. Indeed, encouraging more women to interpret unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment remains a valid project. My proposals should, therefore, be viewed as additions rather than replacements.

My argument is that the workplace bullying and sexual harassment discourses can inform each other in the following ways in order to address the above mentioned limitations and thus deepen feminist analyses of the injustices women and men now encounter at work. Firstly, the emergence of ‘workplace bullying’ in the UK in the 1990s demonstrates that new interpretations of types of workplace harassment can be successfully introduced. Therefore, women do not need to define all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment in order to condemn such experiences. Indeed, Epstein’s (1996) analysis of ‘sexist harassment’ offers one important indication of this point. My data will extend Epstein’s insights. I will show that women use a range of terms to describe unwanted male sexual conduct. I will argue that these terms must now be adopted by feminists in order to enable more women to recognise and perhaps challenge unwelcome experiences. Otherwise, if feminists continue to encourage women to interpret all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment and women do not want to do so, there is a danger that women will feel forced to accept any experience which they do not interpret as ‘sexual harassment’ as ‘just part of everyday life’, in the way advocated by anti-feminist backlash spokespersons (e.g. Roiphe, 1994).

Secondly, the workplace bullying discourse stresses that men as well as women encounter non-sexual victimisation. I will argue that the workplace sexual harassment discourse must join the workplace bullying discourse in recognising men as victims of workplace harassment, not just in order to avoid the anti-feminist backlash, but because it is untenable for feminists to ignore or marginalise men’s experiences of victimisation.

Analyses of men's experiences of peer pressure (e.g. Holland et al, 1990) have shown that men can encounter sexual victimisation. My data will show how men are sexually harassed by men or women at work when they fail to conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Thirdly, serious single incidents of sexual harassment already count as sexual harassment and feminist sexual harassment researchers insist that single experiences of arguably 'low-key' sexual harassment and 'dripping tap' sexual harassment (i.e. an accumulation of small incidents) are politically important. For example, Wise and Stanley (1987:114) argue that it is important to recognise 'dripping tap' intrusions because by doing so:

We recognise that they're important and common, rather than trite and confined to 'just me' and my 'peculiarities', and we see them as limiting, oppressive and ethically wrong political behaviours because they attempt to disempower us. Out of this we come to see that 'politics' is about power, influence and control, and can be located in the most humdrum and supposedly 'insignificant' of things (Wise and Stanley, 1987:114).

As such, I argue the workplace bullying discourse must problematise the emphasis on persistent and serious experiences. While my analysis will show that workers are now just beginning to adapt this discourse to their own circumstances (e.g. by defining particular incidents of arguably 'low key' harassment and persistent 'dripping tap' experiences as workplace bullying), this clearly needs to be more widely understood in order for the range of workplace bullying incidents to be named in everyday life, campaigning and research.

Fourthly, gender dynamics have always been central to feminist analyses of sexual harassment. If the social relations of gender are power relations, then these will also be present in bullying situations. In this thesis, I will demonstrate how gender may either be immediately apparent in workplace bullying when gender prejudice informs line managers' bullying of men and women workers or present but less instantly visible in workplace bullying because gender is already embedded in the organisation.

This fruitful dialogue that I propose between the workplace sexual harassment and bullying discourses suggests that men's and women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying might be conceptualised together as 'workplace abuse of power'. Annabel's (1997) suggestion is an argument which is helpful in campaigning against workplace bullying and harassment, but I do not think that it is an argument which gives sufficient analytical leverage on these social phenomena. This thesis will demonstrate that the current interpretations of 'workplace bullying' and 'workplace sexual harassment' are important: the workplace sexual harassment discourse has always been very effective in establishing that men's unwanted sexual conduct towards women is unacceptable and the workplace bullying discourse is currently being very effective in establishing that specific forms of unfairness are unacceptable rather than inevitable parts of the social relations of work.

My argument, in contrast to Annabel (1997) and Price and Black (1997), is that the specificity of 'workplace bullying' and 'workplace sexual harassment' matters and should not be obscured simply in order to recognise the connections between types of workplace harassment. As such, I suggest that the concept of the continuum might be deployed as a useful way to achieve my two aims of recognising the similarities between workplace sexual harassment and bullying and retaining the specificity of these forms of workplace harassment. The concept of the continuum has already been deployed by Kelly (1988) to analyse women's experiences of sexual violence. Kelly uses the concept of the continuum in two ways. Firstly, she argues that there is 'a basic common character that underlies many different events'. With regard to women's experiences of sexual violence, she says that this is the abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force men use to undermine women. Secondly, Kelly argues that these types of sexual violence are 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished'. This means that there are no clearly defined categories into which men's behaviour can be placed: for example, rape extends traditional heterosexual exchanges.

In this thesis I will use this conception of a continuum to develop my analysis of the themes I have outlined above. To do this I will explore a number of continua: the continuum between 'sexual harassment' and women's alternative conceptualisations for unwanted male sexual conduct at work, e.g. 'sexism'; the continuum between men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment; the continuum between a particular incident of 'low key' workplace

bullying, persistent 'dripping tap' workplace bullying, one-off 'sledgehammer' (i.e. serious) workplace bullying and recurrent 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying; the continuum between women's experiences of workplace bullying and men's experiences of workplace bullying; and the continuum between workplace sexual harassment and bullying. Following Kelly (1988), I will deploy the concept of the continuum to demonstrate a i) 'basic common character' of women's and men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying, and to interpret these experiences as ii) 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished' at the borders of these phenomena. In common with Kelly (1988:76), I stress that my usage of the word 'continuum' should not be taken to imply a statement of the relative seriousness of different forms of workplace harassment: my perspective is that all forms of workplace harassment are serious and that it is inappropriate to create a hierarchy of abuse within a feminist analysis. This thesis will demonstrate that men's and women's experiences of the types of workplace harassment analysed are 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished' at the borders of these phenomena. A 'basic common character' of these experiences is that one person is exercising power in ways which does harm to another person. Yet to remain at the very abstract level of such a generic characterisation does not take us far enough. So analytically we need to grasp both the generic common denominator and the specific variants of power and harm involved. The sexual harassment of women by men always involves at least the potential for rape, as does - though this may figure less centrally in male victims' minds - the sexual harassment of men by men (Lees, 1997

explains that both the victims and perpetrators of male rape are often heterosexuals). The sexual harassment of men by women does not have this threat. Equally, while the bullying line manager may have the power to dismiss an unwanted employee, the unpleasant co-worker does not explicitly possess such a right.

Chapter Structure

In Chapter 2, I explore the process of doing feminist research into women's and men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying. I explain the background to the project, the methods and methodology employed, the data production implications of recruiting informants through the media and the data analysis process. As indicated above, while the sexual harassment of gay men/men perceived to be gay has been recognised by feminists, heterosexual men as the victims of workplace harassment are usually absent from feminist sexual harassment research. Therefore, a particular concern of this chapter is to make a case for the inclusion of such men in feminist workplace harassment research. Nevertheless, my impressions of discussing sexualised topics in the context of gendered interview dynamics are also a key theme. This discussion reveals subtle ways in which male informants may sexually harass a female interviewer.

Chapters 3 and 4 present my analyses of sexual harassment at work. Men's unwanted sexual conduct towards women is taken up fully in Chapter 3. As explained above, many feminists are concerned that most women are not interpreting unwanted male sexual

conduct as sexual harassment. I think that this concern can be put into perspective by highlighting the experiences of women who do define unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment and critically reflecting upon the experiences of women who define unwanted male sexual conduct in alternative ways. Heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by men or women are the subject of Chapter 4. This is not pursued because of a liberal desire to be fair in acknowledging that individuals of either sex may harass (Brant and Too, 1994:14-15). My argument is that the only way in which feminists can decide if men can be sexually harassed and if such experiences are important is to ask men for their experiences of sexual harassment - rather than ignore or marginalise such experiences. My analysis will assess the ways in which men's experiences of sexual harassment by men or women are underpinned by a restrictive discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Chapters 5 to 7 present my analyses of workplace bullying. In Chapter 5, I develop a history of the workplace bullying discourse, based on newspaper/newsletter articles, trade union policies/publications/conference reports and radio/television programmes. The theme of workers' definitions of workplace harassment is explored further here. We see that many workers conceptualise 'persistence' as the defining feature of workplace bullying, although there is evidence that single events, for example, are beginning to be understood as workplace bullying. This provides me with an opportunity to critique the emphasis on 'persistence' in the current workplace bullying discourse. Given the paucity of academic analyses of the dynamics of bullying at work, Chapter 6 supplies a detailed

exploration of the workplace bullying experiences of six men and women who are employed in managerial/professional and subordinate jobs. One significant limitation of the workplace bullying discourse, as noted above, is the presentation of this experience as gender-neutral. This is challenged in Chapter 7. I analyse the accounts of three civil servants to consider the ways in which the workplace bullying of men and women by line managers is underpinned by gender prejudice. My argument is that an in-depth, qualitative analysis of workplace bullying can resolve the dispute about how far workers' gendered identities are implicated in workplace bullying. The final chapter, Chapter 8, recapitulates and draws together the various themes of this analysis.

Chapter Two

Doing Feminist

Research on Women's and Men's Experiences of Workplace Bullying and Sexual Harassment

Introduction

This chapter explores my experiences of doing feminist research on women's and men's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment. I begin by detailing the research design process. This leads to a discussion of whether or not feminists should study the experiences of men who have encountered workplace harassment. Next, I explain the research methods employed in this study, in order to show how the material to be explored in subsequent data analysis chapters has been produced. These methods are set in the context of current feminist debates on research methods. As most of my informants were recruited through the media, I then turn to a consideration of the data production implications of the differing ways in which broadcast and printed media disseminated my appeal for interviewees. Next, I discuss my experiences of interviewing informants. I reflect in detail upon my impressions of discussing sexualised topics in the context of gendered interview dynamics. I detail my repertoire of personal safety strategies and analyse the dilemmas regarding control, rapport and reciprocity which arose from these tactics. A further aspect of interviewing, namely women and men informants' construction of a plausible interview account of workplace bullying is discussed later, in Chapter 5. I conclude this chapter by reflecting upon the process of analysing the data produced in this research. This final section demonstrates that 'writing up' is not simply a mechanical process.

Feminist research practice

Retrospective reflections and reflexivity

This chapter draws on detailed field notes written while I was defining the research questions, choosing the research methods and conducting the interviews. However, the majority of the chapter has been written in the final stages of the research (i.e. after the argument of the thesis had been developed). As such, then, I am aware of the temptation to represent the research in a ‘hygienic’ manner (Wise and Stanley, 1993:155), as a seamless narrative without dead-ends, U-turns, frustrations and despair (Stacey, 1994:50). To do so is, of course, not inherently wrong. As Stacey (1994) observes in her reflections upon studying women film audiences, a ‘doctored’ account (Wise and Stanley, 1993:155) offers structure and form with which to organise what are often rather haphazard and arbitrary steps in the research process. Order is imposed upon what once seemed chaos and process becomes product (Stacey, 1994:50). Indeed, to describe all events as they happened would be uninteresting, lengthy and impractical (Wise and Stanley, 1993:155).

Paralleling Stacey (1994:50-51), therefore, in this chapter I offer a retrospective interpretation of my research project, but I also include discussion of the less fruitful avenues I pursued as well as those which ultimately led in more productive directions. Wise and Stanley (1993:165), in a discussion of feminist epistemology, declare that this is an essential aspect of feminist research practice. They argue that feminists must make

available to other people the reasoning procedures which underlie the knowledge produced out of research.

The initial research design process

When I began my PhD in October 1994, I intended to carry out a qualitative, ethnographic study of women's experiences of sexual harassment in temporary employment. My interest in sexual harassment at work had been raised by my own employment experiences. I started a degree in French Studies in 1989 and subsequently realised that I had chosen the wrong subject. I took a year off to reconsider my position, during which time I worked as a junior revenues officer in a local government community charge department. All the women staff in the department (which was 99 per cent female) experienced sexual harassment perpetrated by a male manager. He would pat women on the head, stand too close, grab women round the waist and make sexual innuendoes. Subsequently, I returned to a different university to finish my degree (having discovered that it was too late to change my course). During most vacations, I did temporary office work in a variety of organisations, where women temporary workers were either ignored or chatted up.

On becoming a postgraduate, I decided to study the dynamics of workplace sexual harassment for my MA dissertation. As I wanted to make an original contribution to the debate, I chose to study temporary office work rather than office work *per se*, as at the time there were no published studies of workplace sexual harassment in temporary

employment. My own experiences of being a temporary office worker enabled me to formulate a set of hypotheses for exploratory research. I considered that temporary workers might be perceived as 'easy targets' for workplace sexual harassment because of job insecurity and unfamiliarity with the workplace or equally that they might escape the damaging effects of workplace sexual harassment because of their isolation from permanent co-workers and short stay in organisations. On completing this preliminary study (Lee, 1994), I envisaged conducting a deeper analysis of workplace sexual harassment in temporary employment for my PhD. Over time, however, the direction of my doctoral work changed quite significantly.

In the course of my MA research, while attempting to persuade one temporary employment agency manager to allow me to send out questionnaires to women temporary workers, I had been asked whether I was only interested the workplace sexual harassment or whether I was interested in all types of mistreatment encountered by women temporary workers (e.g. 'nastiness' and 'isolation'). At the time, I had not considered doing so. (This area has subsequently begun to be addressed by Rogers (1995), who interprets such experiences as alienation.) An important reason why I had not considered studying 'nastiness' was that when I drafted my MA research proposal I had not yet encountered the term 'workplace bullying'. During the summer of 1994, however, I heard Andrea Adams on a radio programme publicising her self-help psychology/social issues text on workplace bullying (Adams, 1992). This led me to realise that many of my own employment experiences could be interpreted as 'workplace bullying'. For instance, after

graduating in 1993, I had taken a permanent administration/customer service job in telephone banking. This had ended abruptly three months later when I was appraised unfairly as a poor performer and walked out - luckily just in time to apply to do an MA in Interdisciplinary Women's Studies.

The idea of researching workplace bullying as part of my PhD then lay dormant for several months. At the beginning of my period of registration, I reviewed workplace sexual harassment literature in order to refine my research proposal. This review of literature revealed that feminist researchers had never previously analysed male sexual harassers. (This area has subsequently begun to be addressed by Watson (1994) and Thomas (1997).) I felt that an analysis of men as sexual harassers might uncover men's motivations for engaging in this type of conduct. I decided, therefore, to broaden the scope of my research to include male sexual harassers as well as women sexual harassment victims. The literature review also demonstrated that most workplace sexual harassment research consistently denies that men can be sexually harassed (e.g. Herbert, 1992). At the time, I agreed with this assertion and did not, therefore, envisage exploring men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment as part of my research.

My position changed, however, after I carried out an exploratory study of workplace bullying as part of the assessment for the Sociology Department Doctoral Training Programme. This assessment required that I conduct a small piece of research on a topic not necessarily central to my PhD. As indicated above, I had already been alerted to the

emergence of workplace bullying as a newly labelled type of workplace harassment. Importantly, however, I knew that I would be able to recruit two interviewees to take part in the research. A male friend (a retail manager) had begun to encounter problems with his new area manager (e.g. constant criticism). A male acquaintance (an accountant) was experiencing problems with his co-workers (i.e. isolation) in a temporary job. From what I already knew of the men's experiences, they appeared consistent with Adams' (1992) definition of workplace bullying. I decided that my project would focus on the dynamics of the men's experiences. I wanted to explore the similarities and differences in the experience of workplace sexual harassment and bullying.

My findings (Lee, 1995) provided preliminary evidence that men's experiences of workplace bullying have similarities with women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. On the basis of these findings, I decided to include workplace bullying in my PhD research. My conclusions that workplace bullying and sexual harassment have similarities and that men could encounter workplace bullying led me to want to re-assess my earlier conviction that men could not be sexually harassed. My PhD research, therefore, became a study of men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment.

Studying men who have experienced workplace harassment: Is this feminist research?

My research, therefore, had evolved from a study of women's experiences to a study of men's and women's experiences. The addition of men as victims and victimisers raised the question of whether or not my research could now be presented as feminist research. Kelly (1984:84) has argued that, 'doing research as a feminist means focusing in detail on some specific aspect of women's oppression'. My concern with women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying did fit in with Kelly's conceptualisation of doing research as a feminist, but my interest in men's experiences of being sexual harassers and men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying remained outside this influential definition. Wise and Stanley (1993), however, partially disagree with Kelly, in a way which shows that an analysis of men as sexual harassers can be perceived as feminist research. They say that, 'any analysis of women's oppression *must* involve research on the part played by men in this' (Wise and Stanley, 1993:31. *Italics in original*). Clearly, feminist research as envisaged by Kelly would involve analysis of men as the oppressors of women. Wise and Stanley's comments, however, go beyond this. They advocate, for example, interviewing male rapists as well as female rape victims. Maynard (1994:15) points out that Wise and Stanley's assertion is still a relatively underdeveloped aspect of feminist research but it raises important questions about whether such work is solely about women's experiences. Thus, my intended analysis of male sexual harassers would be both consistent with Wise and Stanley's (1993) assertion and could offer a means of developing their argument. However, my intention to analyse men's experiences of being the victims of workplace sexual harassment and bullying was inconsistent with even Wise and Stanley's expanded definition of feminist research. Importantly, though, Maynard

(1994:15) had observed that many of those who have written about feminist research practice have indicated that a theoretical perspective, acknowledging the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life, is one of its most important defining characteristics, but that it is not entirely clear what focusing on gender means in terms of the subjects of research. I concluded, therefore, that it is not completely unthinkable to make a space for men as victims in feminist research. To say otherwise would be to wrongly imply that feminist research is static.

However, feminists who have researched men's experiences report that they encounter dilemmas in doing so. Stanko (1994:103), for example, in her reflections on feminism and criminology, expresses reluctance to study man-to-man violence because of her personal commitment to women's safety. Layland (1990), in reflections upon her research into masculinity and gay men, explains that when she first decided on this topic, she was not sure whether this could be seen as feminist research. She had read Kelly's (1984) conceptualisation of feminist research and 'with these ideas in mind, plus misgivings about "putting energy into men", I experienced my interest in my chosen topic as paradoxical. Not for the first time, I questioned whether I was a feminist at all' (Layland, 1990:125). I think that Layland's situation was perhaps slightly less paradoxical than she felt. Wise and Stanley (1987:91-93) argue that gay men use, abuse, patronise and rip off women wherever and whenever possible. However, pervasive homophobia unquestionably positions gay men as men who have experiences of oppression. Such men's experiences are often similar to women's experiences. For example, Epstein (1996) has drawn

comparisons between gay men's experiences of (hetero)sexual harassment and women's experiences of (hetero)sexual harassment.

In contrast with Layland, I anticipated that most of my male interviewees would either be heterosexual or would not identify themselves as gay. (This is because men who had encountered homophobia would not be specifically targeted in my appeals for research participants. See below.) To claim that some heterosexual men experience oppression is questionable, especially as there is relatively little feminist research exploring men's experiences of oppression. This paucity of such literature was understandable, of course, in the 1970s. Then, second wave feminists revealed that sociology had previously presented research on 'men' as research on 'people'. Therefore, in order to make women visible, feminists set about researching women's experiences. Subsequently, 'race', class, sexual orientation etc. have been incorporated in feminist research, but gender is still often being taken to mean women. Even feminist books which have a stated aim of inclusiveness persistently omit men from analysis (for example, see my review of Ronai et al (1997) (Lee, 1997d)). I find this not just disappointing but increasingly untenable. The continued absence of men (except as oppressors) in most feminist research means that feminists are missing opportunities to explore men's experiences from a feminist perspective. Thus, I agree with Layland's important conclusion that:

The latent effect of seeing feminist research as exclusively about women's lives is that it allows things male to go uninvestigated, almost as though the idea of the male-as-norm were not being questioned any more (Layland, 1990:129).

Layland thinks, then, that feminist research can explore men's experiences. However, can a woman analyse men's experiences in a meaningful way? As women are not men, we do not know what it is like to be men and to be treated as men. Morgan (1992), fortunately, observes that it is essentialist to assume that all men know something about men which is inaccessible to all women. Paralleling Stanko (1994:103), however, I continue to feel that I do not have the accumulation of gendered knowledge against which to balance what men are saying and sharing about their lives. While I agree with Stanko that gendered researchers are resources for their work, I do not necessarily agree with her tentative conclusion that '[research into men's experiences], I suspect, will have to be done by men' (Stanko, 1994:103). Schacht and Ewing (1997), in a discussion of how men can become feminists, offer an important reason why feminist women rather than men should research men's experiences. They report that men's studies often comes to the conclusion that patriarchy is bad for men, but:

...the problem with the present men's studies emphasis, thinly veiled in feminist theory, is that by almost exclusively focusing on men and their problems, women are, like in larger patriarchal realities, marginalised and ignored. At best, most of the research undertaken by those in men's studies treat images of femininity as secondary variables, while in even more extreme cases, men's oppressive experiences with patriarchy are analysed in terms that marginalise women to the point that they are rendered almost invisible. ... one is often left with the feeling that 'as long as *any male anywhere* is suffering, women are selfish to

mention that they are suffering too' (Johnson, 1987:258 emphasis in original) (Schacht and Ewing, 1997:165).

This indicates that separatism in social science research may result in the creation of a hierarchy of oppressions in which the oppression of men is interpreted as more important than the oppression of women. My argument, therefore, is that feminist research must now be concerned with both women's and men's experiences in order to avoid the creation of such a hierarchy. This does not mean presenting men and women as equally oppressed. Yet while it is indisputable that women are more oppressed than men, this must no longer result in the marginalisation of men's experiences of oppression. Maynard (1994:16) observes that one important way in which feminist research has been claimed to be distinctive is its political nature and potential to bring about change in women's lives. (She notes, though, that such a claim is not uncontentious.) I think that feminist research need not always be concerned simply with women's experiences in order to bring about changes in women's lives. Stanko (1994) explains that her analysis of man-to-man violence is 'a search for how men come to understand violence in their own lives, which might present clues to how to understand how men characterise violence in women's lives' (Stanko, 1994:103). One of my arguments in this research (as outlined in Chapter 1) is that an analysis of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment has potential to free 'sexual harassment' from unfair charges of hysterical 'political correctness' which are levelled by the anti-feminist backlash.

Choosing research methods

Having decided what to research, I then had to decide how to do the research. I recognised that quantitative feminist research has made an important contribution to knowledge and understanding of women's lives, for example, the significance of violence in women's lives is underlined by studies showing the extent and severity of its incidence (Maynard, 1994:13). However, I chose not to carry out a quantitative study myself because there have already been many quantitative studies of workplace sexual harassment (Collier (1995) cites numerous examples) and because ground-breaking quantitative research into workplace bullying in Staffordshire, UK had recently been conducted (see Rayner, 1997). I felt, therefore, that my contribution should be a qualitative study exploring men's and women's workplace harassment experiences. I would be able to draw on the existing quantitative research to situate my qualitative claims in a larger picture.

I decided to conduct qualitative, in-depth interviews, send out questionnaires and carry out periods of covert participant observation in organisations. The rationale for these multiple methods was that interviews and questionnaires would focus on discrete incidents which had been characterised as workplace sexual harassment or bullying by participants. (I thought that some informants might prefer to fill in a questionnaire either instead of or before participating in an interview.). Participant observation, meanwhile, would be able to assess the subtle nuances of sexualised/gendered organisational behaviour and as such would be able to draw out why some behaviours are characterised as harassment, how some interactions are normalised, and how some workplaces avoid promoting

atmospheres conducive to harassment. In Spring 1995, therefore, I carried out some periods of participant observation during temporary jobs I took to support myself financially through my PhD. Most of these jobs were clerical office jobs. I did encounter examples of workplace sexual harassment and bullying, but really needed to find out men's and women's interpretations of events rather than just what I thought was happening. It is very difficult to have in-depth conversations with people in workplaces about 'what has just happened' if you have only known them a few days. As such, I abandoned the strategy of covert participant observation and concentrated on preparing for the interview and questionnaire phase of the research, which was scheduled for June-September 1995.

I chose my questionnaire and interview topics in order to explore the definitions and dynamics of types of workplace harassment. As outlined in Chapter 1, I wanted to consider questions which had been posed but not fully answered in the existing literature (e.g. the similarities between forms of harassment), and to research concerns which had been had not been presented as relevant in the existing literature but which had been highlighted as potentially important in my pilot work (e.g. the gendered character of workplace bullying). The questionnaire (which is reproduced in Appendix 1) is divided into eight sections: 1) What is happening? 2) Where is this happening? 3) Who carries out the harassment/bullying? 4) Are other people affected? 5) Are there any ways to deal with the situation? 6) What are the effects of harassment? 7) How do you define workplace sexual harassment/bullying? 8) Background questions (e.g. age, marital status). In section one, I provided a blank page for informants to write about a particular experience of

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workplace bullying or sexual harassment. In fact, I was concerned to provide space for informants to write answers to questions in all sections, rather than just ticking boxes. For specific yes/no questions, however, I did provide boxes for informants to tick.

I intended that interviews would be semi-structured. I would begin by asking informants to tell me about their experiences. I wrote a list of areas which I wanted to cover. The list of interview topics was broadly similar to the questionnaire design but after a few interviews the topics were refined as follows: What happened (what, where, when, who)?; is this rare/typical in your line of work/workplace?; why do you think s/he behaved like that?; do you think this would have happened if you were a (wo)man?; why do you think harassment happens - is it about personalities or power?; when/why/how did you define this as workplace sexual harassment/sexism/bullying?; how does the experience you have defined as sexual harassment/bullying differ from the established/newer concept of sexual harassment/bullying?; did anyone challenge the harasser (why/why not/how/when/with what outcome)?; did you use any strategies against harassment?; Did you talk about this to colleagues, friends? - were they supportive?; are you in a trade union, if so was this helpful?; is there an equal opportunities policy in your workplace?, if yes was this helpful?; what was the management response? - if action was taken were you satisfied by it?, if not, why not?, how do you think we could stop harassment at work happening?; how could harassment be better dealt with?; background details about harasser/victims: age, sex etc

Recruiting informants

I anticipated that I might encounter difficulties recruiting informants for the research. Previous studies of workplace sexual harassment demonstrate that this is a 'sensitive' subject. MacKinnon (1979:27) observes that women sexual harassment victims feel embarrassed, demeaned and intimidated by sexual harassment. They feel afraid, despairing, utterly alone and complicit. Thus, this is not the sort of experience one discusses readily. While workplace bullying is conceptualised as a non-sexual form of workplace harassment, men and women interviewed by Adams (1992) explained that they had similar feelings.

Renzetti and Lee (1993:30), in their analysis of studying sensitive subjects, note that the problem of recruiting research participants is especially acute for researchers investigating sensitive topics. They observe that in studies of relatively innocuous behaviour or issues, complete sampling frames are often available that allow for random sampling and a sound estimate of sampling bias, but this is rarely the case in the study of sensitive topics. The more sensitive or threatening the topic under examination, the more difficult sampling is likely to be. The study of sensitive topics is not, however, impossible. In fact, Renzetti and Lee suggest a number of ways in which informants can be recruited. One of these suggestions is press advertisements.

In order to recruit men and women to fill in questionnaires and participate in interviews, therefore, I decided that I would place advertisements in the local and national press. This

strategy has been successfully employed by previous feminist researchers (e.g. Phizacklea and Wolkowitz, 1995; Stacey, 1994). On enquiry, however, I discovered that it would be prohibitively expensive to pay for newspaper advertisements. My research budget - to cover advertising and travel expenses - was limited to £50, and a short advertisement in a local newspaper would have cost £200. While the *Guardian* Women's Page is free, there is no guarantee that an advertisement will appear and, furthermore, such an advertisement would have been seen by a very narrow segment of women and very few men. More importantly, Watson (1995) informed me that she had very few replies to her appeal for male sexual harassers and women sexual harassment victims from broadsheet advertisements. She had most responses from advertisements in local newspapers and magazines targeted specifically at male or female readerships.

I arranged a press release - free of charge - through the University of Warwick press office. The press officer felt that my research was particularly suited to a press release because of the topicality of workplace bullying. I would probably be invited to a local radio station to record soundbites. He explained that my qualitative examples of workplace bullying drawn from my pilot work would not be of interest to journalists - I should find statistics on the prevalence of workplace bullying. I was also advised to play down the 'workplace sexual harassment' element of my research in favour of 'workplace bullying'. Otherwise, the press would 'home in on the sex angle'. (This had implications for the number of workplace sexual harassment victims/perpetrators recruited to participate in the research [see below].) In my discussions with the press officer, I

emphasised that I wanted to interview workplace bullies and sexual harassers as well as victims. At the time, I had just read Watson's (1994) analysis of male sexual harassers and women sexual harassment victims. She had 272 responses to her appeals for informants and I was optimistic of doing likewise. In order to recruit male informants (and women who would not identify themselves as feminists) I adopted the Sociology Department as my contact address, rather than my own Centre for the Study of Women and Gender. The press release was written by the press officer. I approved it before it was sent out. It read as follows:

University of Warwick research student, Deborah Lee, is about to embark on a study of workplace bullying and harassment which will involve her talking not just to the bullied but also those perceived to be the bullies. Deborah says: 'The only way we can get a proper understanding of workplace bullying and harassment is to hear more about the position and motivation of those perceived to be doing the bullying. Getting to speak to such people will not be easy, but I am hopeful that many will want to speak to me. Reformed bullies, people who have been genuinely shocked to be labelled as a harasser and others'. Deborah will be looking at bullying in its widest interpretation, from sending people to Coventry right through to sexual harassment and physical and mental bullying. She would welcome contact from anyone who has been bullied or harassed in the workplace or who has witnessed such events or who have been accused of being a bully or harasser. Any information that she receives will be treated as strictly confidential. She can be contacted at the Sociology Department, University of Warwick, Coventry. CV4 7AL. Telephone (01203) 523091.

Response, therefore, largely depended on people interpreting their experiences as 'harassment' and 'bullying'. The label 'sexual harassment' has proved particularly problematic in much previous research. Many women who have had experiences of workplace sexual harassment do not wish to interpret their experiences as such. Collinson and Collinson (1996), for example, in a study of 30 women in insurance sales management, carried out a questionnaire survey and conducted interviews. On questionnaires, only four women stated that they had been victims of workplace sexual harassment. Similarly, direct interview questions which explicitly referred to workplace sexual harassment produced cautious answers. However, in response to the more indirect question: 'Have you ever experienced any behaviour from male colleagues which made you feel uncomfortable, or that was directed at you purely because you were a woman, or that you felt undermined you as an employee?', twenty five women discussed incidents of workplace sexual harassment. In my press release, however, I felt that the inclusion of the example 'sending people to Coventry' and the phrase 'Deborah will be looking at bullying in its widest interpretation' provided significant counterbalances to the emphasis on the labels 'bullying' and 'harassment'.

A live radio interview about workplace bullying: Implications of positioning the researcher as expert

The day after the press release, I received a telephone call from a Midlands radio station inviting me to their studio to take part in a live radio broadcast. On this show, however,

instead of being asked primarily what I *intended* to do, each question seemed to imply that I had *already done* the research. Questions included ‘How would you advise people to deal with bullying at work?’ and ‘How does adult bullying differ from what goes on at school?’. Questioning of this nature is not an opportunity to present possible *hypotheses*. Rather, the researcher needs to provide substantiated *answers*. This indicates, then, that the agenda of a radio show can differ significantly from that of a researcher. This is unsurprising, given that the main priority of radio shows is to broadcast interesting discussion and the main priority of researchers beginning fieldwork is to recruit interviewees.

The positioning of the researcher as expert is not just illustrative of a conflict of priorities, however. For this positioning also had implications for the type of informants that I was able to recruit through this appeal. Four people rang in response. These callers shared similar intentions, which are illustrated by one man’s comment, ‘I heard you on the radio, and I thought I’d get the number down and *see what you think of it*’ (italics added). Two of the callers, therefore, rang primarily because - prompted by the type of questioning they had heard on the radio - they thought that I would be able to advise them. They wanted legal advice and seemed also to want counselling. As I have no training in law or counselling, I did not attempt to respond as an expert in either. Instead, I expressed sympathy for the callers’ experiences and explained what I understand of the legal position. Two other callers requested questionnaires, which they returned. They did not agree to be interviewed. I do not believe, therefore, that this radio interview was

particularly fruitful in recruiting informants, though clearly it raised issues that listeners wanted to discuss.

Two other radio stations recorded taped interviews with me, but these were not broadcast. Waiting to see if these interviews would be broadcast involved wasting a considerable amount of time listening to pop music. I felt that I could not go home in case the interview was suddenly broadcast and people rang in. This experience illustrates a phenomenon that Richardson (1991), discussing her experiences of a book tour, refers to as the 'unpredictability principle' - radio stations can fail to broadcast interviews with researchers if a story which they perceive to be more newsworthy comes along. I stress, though, that I am not seeking to make sweeping criticism of attempting to use the broadcast media to recruit informants. Much later in the research, I recorded taped soundbites for a South of England radio station. This was more helpful and fruitful as it clearly positioned me as a PhD student *beginning* to research particular subjects and appealing for informants. Four people rang in. This resulted in three useful interviews.

Newspapers reproduce the press release: Implications of positioning the researcher as researcher

The press release was reproduced verbatim in several free and purchased local newspapers (e.g. *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, *Coventry Citizen*, *Birmingham Post*, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*) and, later, in a number of trade union newsletters (which I cannot specify in order to protect the anonymity of my informants) and *Network* (the University of Warwick

graduate magazine) which are distributed nationally. As the press release included what was presented as a 'quote' from me, this gave the impression that a journalist had actually spoken to me. These articles, therefore, gave me a first impression of credibility. I appeared as someone whose research was worthy of journalists' attention. Informants responding to these newspaper/newsletter advertisements/articles provided the main data source for the research. Thirty-seven of my 50 interviewees were recruited through these means. I also sent out 18 questionnaires to people who had seen newspaper or trade union newsletter articles.

My intention was to recruit approximately 50 interviewees/questionnaire informants through the press. I had initially expected that these informants would be drawn from the West Midlands and Warwickshire area, given that I expected the press release to be printed by local newspapers. (It was not my intention to focus on workplace bullying and sexual harassment in my local area, but only to minimise the travel expenses.) Once the press release had been released, however, where it appeared was out of my control. When the articles and advertisements were printed in trade union newsletters and the Warwick graduate magazine, I was contacted by informants from almost every part of the UK. This said, the picture my research presents is not nationally representative any more than it is locally representative. Respondents from the West Midlands and Warwickshire area were restricted to readers of local free and purchased newspapers. Respondents from further afield were either University of Warwick graduates or members of particular trade unions. As the appeal for interviewees was printed in certain trade union newsletters - rather than

all trade union newsletters - certain work contexts are completely absent from my research.

A newspaper interview about workplace bullies: Implications of journalistic style

Towards the end of the fieldwork, a journalist rang specifically to see if I had recruited self-confessed workplace bullies. As I had not done so, the journalist decided to print an article appealing for bullies to contact me. He printed the wrong departmental address and omitted to print a telephone number. Though I contacted the department whose address had been printed and asked them to transfer calls and letters to me, I did not receive any responses to this article. A few days after this article appeared, the journalist rang again to ask if any bullies had responded. I said that two women had rung in (I did not add, though, that they had come forward just before the article was printed - I did not want to imply failure and I did not want to lose the journalist's interest in case I needed further press coverage). I talked about these women's comments that they had bullied their subordinates because of the stress they had been subjected to by their own bullying line managers. I mentioned that the wrong address had been printed. Though his next article on the subject did contain discussion of the way pressure filters down through an organisation, it was structured by the lack of response to the original appeal (even though this was potentially caused by his own inaccuracies) and the shared sex of the two respondents: 'Only two bullies respond to appeal, and they are both women!'. This

implied, unfortunately, that the research was unsuccessful and that women carry out more workplace bullying than men.

Also towards the end of the fieldwork, a women's magazine expressed interest in the research. The magazine was (again) particularly keen to hear whether or not I had accessed self-confessed bullies. If I had agreed to help the freelance journalist whom the magazine had commissioned to write an article about workplace bullying, more interviews might have resulted. However, the journalist wanted me to arrange for a number of my interviewees (victims and perpetrators) to talk to him. I probably could have arranged this, but I did not do so because I had not suggested to informants that I might contact them again. Ethical considerations, therefore, outweighed the potential gains of recruiting more interviewees and disseminating the research topics.

A live radio interview about flirting: Implications of positioning the researcher as light entertainment

All in all, I recruited only two male informants who reported that they had been accused of workplace sexual harassment and (see below) one male informant whose male co-worker (a workplace bullying victim) felt he might be termed a sexual harasser and suggested I interview him about his 'experiences of working with women'. At the end of the research, then, I decided upon an alternative strategy to recruit workplace sexual harassers. Given that 'flirting' is much more socially acceptable than 'sexual harassment', I decided to advertise for 'flirts'. I placed my advertisement in *Private Eye*. It appeared in the classified

section under the heading 'eye want', and read as follows: 'University researchers would like to interview men and women who enjoy flirting or being flirted with at work'. This advertisement generated three telephone calls. The first was from a man who sounded drunk. He wanted to tell me about an extra-marital affair he had conducted in a storeroom at his office. The second was from a man who sounded like he thought he was devastatingly attractive. He was never in his house when I rang to interview him. The third was from a woman in a room full of other people. They all thought it was hysterical to be responding to this advertisement. However, when I interviewed the woman we had an interesting discussion about sexual banter in retail employment. (This account is not analysed in the thesis because the woman could not be labelled either as a sexual harasser nor a sexual harassment victim: she was a heterosexual woman working with mainly gay men and said that she enjoyed sexual banter with gay men because there was no question that they would want sexual banter to escalate into a sexual relationship with her.)

The day after this advertisement appeared, a radio station contacted me to ask if I would be on their morning programme. My first inclination was to decline because of the disappointing outcome of the previous live interview. However, this radio station sold themselves to me extremely effectively by stressing the size of their audience. They even offered to participate in interviews themselves (though this did not eventually take place). Unlike the previous live interview which took place in the radio station studio, this interview took place by telephone. I heard the preceding segment of the programme. It was amusing. The interviewer spoke to a man who had written a television programme

about office desks. The aim of interview seemed to be to find every conceivable joke about office desks and having written a programme about office desks. However, rather than just this particular interview being presented as light entertainment, when my interview began I discovered that the *whole programme* was intended to provide light entertainment:

On this programme we always find the amusing and interesting stories for you! We found this advert: 'University researcher would like to interview men and women who enjoy flirting and being flirted with at work' and at the other end of the phone we found Deborah!

This was delivered in a tone of barely suppressed mirth. I did not wish to appear as merely an 'amusing and interesting story' as I felt that this might discourage people from ringing in. Therefore, in response to the first question about why I was carrying out this research, I talked seriously about the difficulty and importance of finding out how flirting is different from workplace sexual harassment. However, the presenter's next questions were much more directed and therefore allowed much less scope for serious answers - for example, he enquired: 'Is there much flirting at the University of Warwick?'. The interview ended with an anti-spinster, heterosexual question, 'If this isn't very sexist, what does your boyfriend think of you doing this?'. I commented, 'That is sexist, isn't it'. The presenter responded, 'Ooh, I've been put in my place now, haven't I?'. In this last interchange, then, I did regain a small measure of control over a rather out of control interview. However, I did not have one response from this programme. The radio station, on the other hand, had

filled time with a titillating subject. Off-air, the presenter thanked me warmly. This experience, then, is illustrative of the consequences which may follow when (in the words of the university press officer) the media 'homes in on the sex angle'.

Summary

This discussion of my experiences dealing with the media demonstrates a process involving both false trails and real scope for recruiting interviewees. I suggest that the contrast between three responses to a magazine advertisement for flirts and no responses from a radio show; three useful interviews from a set of soundbites, in contrast with callers wanting legal advice and counselling after a radio discussion of workplace bullying; and between being unattractively presented after a conversation with a journalist about bullies and 37 interviews and 10 questionnaire responses after newspapers/newsletters simply reproduced the whole press release shows that it is *very focused*, printed or verbal appeals for research informants - rather than more free-flowing discussions or newspaper articles - which might be the most effective means of recruiting workplace harassment interviewees. For the very focused appeals allow the researcher - rather than the media - to retain control over the way the research is presented. My experiences illustrate, as Richardson (1991:294) has pointed out, that the media and social science are competing institutions. Richardson counsels that the social scientist has to discover and implement ways to use the media rather than being used by it. My experiences are, to a certain extent, structured by my inexperience in dealing with the media. Richardson, for example, reports that she

had training in dealing with the media before she embarked upon her book tour. I had no such preparation. Nevertheless, my final conclusion is that free-flowing interviews are often quite inappropriate when no fieldwork has been carried out. The researcher has nothing new to report. Free-flowing interviews may have a much more important role in disseminating the research when the research has been completed. Then, the researcher can present the findings of her/his project in an informed manner.

Interview and questionnaire statistics

Interviews

Anyone who rang or wrote in response to radio programmes/trade union newsletters/newspaper articles to offer themselves for interview was invited for interview. This was partly a cautious response, in case few people wanted to participate. It was partly a polite response, as I did not wish to be ungrateful for anyone's offered contribution. Mainly, though, the strategy was employed in order to obtain a wide range of experiences from a variety of work environments. All in all fifty four people agreed to be interviewed. Two women did not turn up, and did not ring to arrange an alternative time. Two women were unable to attend due to illness, and did not ring to arrange an alternative time. Four other people did not attend at the interview time which had been arranged, but did ring to make an alternative appointment - which they then kept. Therefore, almost all of the people who agreed to be interviewed turned up to be

interviewed. This indicates the importance interviewees attached to giving their accounts to a researcher.

In addition to the three interviewees recruited through the broadcast media and thirty seven interviewees recruited through the printed media, two questionnaires sent out after printed media appeals led to interviews. Eight informants heard of my study through friends. Two further informants were recruited through previous informants - one through a personal contact and one through an informant who responded to a newspaper appeal. Recruiting informants through previous informants ('snowballing') was not, therefore, a strategy which was much used in this research - even though almost all informants said that they knew a number of workplace harassment victims. Two women informants took copies of my questionnaire to hand out in their offices. They felt that co-workers would want to participate. This did not lead to further interviews or questionnaire responses. This might indicate that people are less keen to participate in workplace harassment research if they do not have direct contact with the researcher.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours, with most being roughly an hour long. All interviews were taped. I interviewed 21 men and 29 women. I have listed the work contexts from which informants were drawn at the beginning of Chapter 3 (pp 127-8) and in Chapter 5 (p 217). One informant was under 20; nine informants were in the 20-30 age range; fifteen informants were in the 30-40 age range; thirteen informants were in the 40-50 age range; ten informants were in the 50-60 age range and two informants were

over 60. Forty-eight interviewees were white. Two were black. Only one interviewee identified himself as gay. No-one mentioned disabilities. Though my informants are roughly split between men and women and cover a wide range of ages, they are not representative of the UK population as a whole. The absence of black, disabled, gay and lesbian informants is problematic. If I had the opportunity to recruit more interviewees, I would certainly seek to recruit Black, disabled, gay and lesbian key informants. These absences are, to a certain extent, another result of the bias of the press release. Racism, disablism, homophobia and anti-lesbian harassment were not explicitly mentioned in my appeal for interviewees.

Questionnaires

As mentioned above, I sent out 18 questionnaires. Ten were returned. Two led to interviews. (The questionnaire response rate is good, yet I think the response rate would have been even higher had the fieldwork not taken place in the summer holiday season July - September 1995. Several people commented when requesting questionnaires that they would not be able to return them immediately because they were going away. They then often failed to return their questionnaires, even though I sent reminder letters.)

Eight questionnaires did not lead to interviews. Two of these described a single incident. When I spoke to these informants they did not feel that they had anything to add to their account in an interview. Two came from people who lived a long way from Coventry. The

time and cost involved in inviting them for interview at the university, or visiting them myself was prohibitive (I exceeded the £50 research budget early in the fieldwork). Two informants did not express interest in an interview. Two questionnaire informants expressed considerable interest in being interviewed, but did not respond to letters inviting them to do so. This was surprising, but perhaps they had decided not to do so or been dissuaded from doing so in the interim.

Types of experiences reported in interviews and questionnaires

At the interview/questionnaire stage, I recorded informants' experiences in a rough-and-ready fashion according to how the informant defined their experiences. (My statistics do not add up to the number of people whom I interviewed and who completed questionnaires, as a number of people reported multiple experiences.) Thirty-five people defined experiences as workplace bullying. (The predominance of accounts of workplace bullying is a consequence of the bias of my press release.) Fifteen people defined experiences as workplace sexual harassment. Four people reported workplace sexism. Two people had encountered workplace bullying and sexual harassment. Six people felt that their experiences could be defined as either workplace sexual harassment/workplace sexism or workplace bullying. This, then, highlights the difficulties of defining workplace harassment experiences.

Gender and interviewing

Feminist sociologists raised the centrality of the gender of interviewer and interviewee as one of their first inputs into feminist sociology. Oakley (1981) drew upon her experiences of interviewing women about motherhood to roundly critique unproblematised methodological textbook directives on interviewing. She made the then radical proposals that the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee should be non-hierarchical and the interviewer should be prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship (Oakley, 1981:41). Oakley's insights provoked - and continue to provoke - much thoughtful debate among feminists. For example, Finch (1984) reflected upon her studies of mothers involved in playgroups and her discussions with clergy wives to comment on the distinctive character of the woman-to-woman interview. She noted that her female informants showed a high degree of trust in her and expected her to understand what they meant because of the shared gender of interviewer and interviewee (Finch, 1984:76). Feminists have also problematised this assertion of woman-to-woman identification. Riessman (1991), in a discussion of interviewing women about their life histories, explained how two women interviewees - one Anglo and one Hispanic - used different narrative genres to make meaning of their experiences of marital separation. The Anglo woman was fully understood by her White, middle-class interviewer. However, for the Hispanic woman talking to an Anglo interviewer, gender was not enough to create the shared understandings necessary for a successful interview. Riessman noted that the lack of shared cultural norms about how a narrative should be organised, coupled with unfamiliar cultural themes in the content of the narrative itself, created barriers to understanding (Riessman, 1991:217). Feminists have also begun to express concern about

intimacy in interviews. Stacey (1991) questioned whether the appearance of respect for and equality with research subjects masks exploitation (Stacey, 1991:113). As a result of this work, sophisticated analyses of feminists interviewing women are readily available to offer fledgling researchers some guidance through the ethics and politics of this form of interview. The developing analysis of woman-to-woman interviews continually advances feminist theorising on the research process.

I felt that my women informants related to me as a woman. As 28 of the 29 women I interviewed were white and all 29 women interviewees identified themselves as heterosexual, there were no obvious points of division between interviewer and interviewee as I am white and heterosexual. The interviewees and I often found that we shared common experiences: for example I interviewed women who had been employed in temporary and permanent clerical/secretarial jobs in local government and telephone banking. As has been reported in other studies (e.g. Finch, 1984), women showed a high degree of trust in a woman workplace harassment researcher. For instance, women spoke in detail about how their experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying had affected them in ways that do not conform to 'appropriate' gender conduct for women, e.g. a woman explained how she had 'hit the bottle' every night after getting home from a job where she was encountering workplace bullying. A woman whose experience of workplace sexual harassment had culminated in an incident of coercive sex explained that she had not told her male partner that this had happened. Though she stressed that this incident must be extremely well camouflaged in my research, she has not subsequently

contacted me to be reassured that I have adequately disguised her identity. (In fact, I have been so concerned that I might not alter the account sufficiently that I have reluctantly decided against its inclusion.) A woman who had encountered workplace bullying said that she had no objection to the use of her real name in my research rather than a pseudonym. These examples indicate that the women felt sure that I would not analyse their experiences in ways that they would think inappropriate.

In contrast to the extensive literature on woman-to-woman interviewing, feminist reflections on women interviewing men remain in disappointingly short supply. McKee and O'Brien (1983) and Smart (1984), however, offered important exceptions to this omission. Their exploratory contributions, unfortunately, have inexplicably failed to stimulate any significant debate. McKee and O'Brien drew upon their research on new fathers and lone fathers to illustrate how gender has profound implications both for what is disclosed or withheld, pursued or neglected in interviews (McKee and O'Brien, 1983:147). While Oakley had encouraged interviewers to interview non-hierarchically, McKee and O'Brien's work implicitly contested this assumption that interviewers always have more power than interviewees. For they report that their male interviewees often attempted to control the interview situation. Smart, in her historical and theoretical study of the law and its development in relation to the family and marriage, explicitly (but pessimistically) commented on men's control of interviews. She noted that in order to complete an interview female interviewers may feel obliged to listen placidly while male interviewees express sexist views. She related this complicity to women's everyday role as

the facilitators of male speech, and concluded that the feminist interviewer can experience the interview as doubly oppressive. Firstly she is unable to express alternative views and secondly she reconfirms the typical model of male/female verbal exchange (Smart, 1984:155-6). Though Finch had argued that same-gender identification is a central feature of fruitful interviews, McKee and O'Brien's experiences implicitly suggested that different-gender identification might be equally important in certain research projects. They reported that male interviewees found cross-gender talk about pregnancy easier, more appropriate and less threatening than discussing this topic with men (McKee and O'Brien, 1983:153). Padfield and Proctor (1996), researching the work and family experiences and aspirations of young adult women, have recently provided analysis of the effect of interviewer's gender on the interview process. They discovered that many of their interviewees did not think it should matter whether they spoke to a female or a male interviewer. However, the women recognised that this formal principle of equality applied only under certain conditions relating to their own skills at dealing with 'masculinity' and to the male researcher's ability to put aside inappropriate features of a form of masculinity - such as arrogance and failing to listen. The exploratory insights offered by these analyses, I would suggest, clearly show that cross-gender interviewing is distinct from woman-to-woman interviewing and is deserving of much more sustained attention than it has yet received from feminists. In this section, therefore, I hope to begin a debate on this largely undisturbed terrain, by reflecting openly upon my personal experiences of interviewing men. I begin by explaining why I feel that interviewer vulnerability might have a central place in discussions of woman-to-man interviewing.

Interviewer vulnerability

First of all, I reiterate that my particular research area can be defined as ‘sensitive’, in the terms proposed by Renzetti and Lee (1993). They explain that a sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data (Renzetti and Lee 1993:5). Though I always began interviews by explaining that only I would hear the tape of the interview, that I would destroy the tape after I had transcribed it, and that I would not use interviewees’ names or any other identifying details in my work, many informants returned to the question of confidentiality during the interview, asking: ‘You won’t put the company name/my name in this, will you?’. When writing up the research, I was concerned about how I would be able to negotiate confidentiality and specificity. For it is often analytically important, but problematical as regards anonymity, to link an informant’s employment context with the experience of harassment they have reported. These points, often discussed in literature on the research process, show that research is a risky enterprise. One form of risk which is less often highlighted, however, concerns the potential vulnerability of interviewers in interview situations and in what ways this potential vulnerability might affect features of interviewing like control, rapport and reciprocity. I stress that I am not claiming that a focus on these topics exhausts original discussion of the dynamics of my cross-gender

interviews. In this section, however, I am concerned to begin to develop a sustained analysis of certain, previously unexplored dynamics of woman-to-man interviewing.

Poyner and Warne (1988:5) note that many jobs where staff are vulnerable to violence from members of the public are those which involve working in isolation from immediate colleagues. As examples of such jobs, they cite bus drivers, railway ticket collectors, interviewers in cubicles (such as housing and benefits staff) and employees who make home visits (such as social workers and community health workers). I should like to propose that researchers making home visits to carry out interviews and interviewing on a one-to-one basis in a private office might have a place on this list of potentially risky occupations. For though at first glance it would appear that people who respond willingly to appeals for interviewees have nothing in common with aggressive train fare evaders, it would be naive to consider one-to-one interviewing as an entirely safe proposition. This is so because of the very nature of much fieldwork. People previously unknown to the researcher come forward in response to appeals for informants and offer to discuss their experiences. The researcher, delighted to have responses, arranges a meeting - but does so without any concrete guarantee that the respondent's motives are non-threatening, or that they will remain so in the fluid context of the interview. While the possibility for trouble is of course present for both male and female interviewers interviewing either women or men, I would argue that the risk is currently of heightened concern to women who interview men, given evidence of the frequency of men's sexual violence against women (see e.g. Kelly, 1988), and the ability which men have (whether it is intentional or

unintentional) of making women fear attack. My argument here is not rooted in biological determinism, nor am I suggesting that all men are potential rapists. Instead, I am stressing that the very nature of a one-off interview means that the woman interviewer has no prior knowledge of her male informant against which she can judge whether or not to feel threatened or concerned by the prospect of interacting with him in a private setting. I am, of course, painfully aware that my argument here could be misinterpreted and turned to women's disadvantage. I emphasise that I am not arguing for policing of women's movements. I am not saying that women should not interview men. I do not believe that the ability to cope with violent behaviour is solely a male attribute. Instead, I do think that until men's behaviour undergoes radical change - (I am stressing, therefore, that men's oppression of women is not fixed) - it remains prudent for women interviewers to be realistic about the potential for trouble that any man may present. I would suggest that this caution is especially salient when an interview juxtaposes privacy of setting with an agenda specifying discussion of sex. This does include workplace sexual harassment interviews, for men often conceptualise workplace sexual harassment as being about sex rather than power (see Watson, 1994). The experiences of feminist researchers can be drawn in to illustrate my point. For example, Kitzinger, in her work on anti-lesbian harassment, reports that after an academic discussion of current research projects - during which she told a male colleague that she was a lesbian - he attempted to kiss her, and was baffled by her outrage 'clearly believing that in coming out as lesbian I had "introduced sex into the conversation"' (Kitzinger, 1994:135). I would suggest that this experience may be added to McKee and O'Brien's comment that: '...any young woman who voluntarily enters into

a “strange” man’s house alone may be seen as somehow “asking” for trouble - a form of “contributory negligence”?’ (1983:157). Thus, I conclude that if a woman researcher interviews a man in his own home or invites him into a private office - especially to discuss experiences that men may think involve sex - she may have inadvertently created a potentially problematical situation.

This possibility for trouble is seriously underplayed in existing studies in which women interviewed men. McKee and O’Brien, for example, do not fully develop their comment that though the potential for sexual violation is omnipresent, it ‘may or may not present itself in individual interactions’ (1983:157). They report that on two occasions in their study of lone fathers the female interviewer sensed real physical danger. They detail one example to show how the boundaries between woman as ‘scientific observer’, confidant, and sexual being are sometimes finely negotiated and often conflated. The example involves a seemingly even-tempered male informant who offered his female interviewer a lift to the railway station after his interview. During the journey he became increasingly enraged about his ex-wife’s behaviour:

eventually driving *past* the station. When he drove past the next station, the interviewer became very worried, tried to calm him down and neutralise the topic of conversation. At the *third* station she insisted that he stop and let her out there. This was an anxious moment because during the interview he had described his karate skills and drawn attention to his general physical prowess and strength. Although he did not initiate any physical contact, his unpredictable behaviour in the car left the interviewer very relieved to

have ‘escaped’ and at that point glad that the study was not longitudinal in nature! (McKee and O’Brien, 1983:158) (*italics in original*).

While this example does indeed show how interview roles in woman-to-man interviewing are sometimes finely negotiated and often conflated, the presentation of the incident disappointingly minimises the safety implications that might be drawn from the account. For through the inappropriate employment of italics, inverted commas and exclamation marks, the episode is presented almost as an adventure story, rather than a serious exposition of the difficulties women may face when interviewing men. In contrast to McKee and O’Brien, other female researchers (e.g. Scott, 1984; Foster, 1994) present their accounts of difficulties encountered during research on non-sexual subjects in a much more sophisticated fashion. For example, Scott reports that in her study of academia she carried out an interview with a male postgraduate in his home. On the telephone to arrange the appointment he said that the interview would have to take place in his bedroom, as he had the builders in and the rest of the house was a mess. When Scott arrived at the house, however:

The room, to my disquiet, was in pristine condition, with not a loose floorboard in sight. Waiting for him to return [from the bank], *I went through a rather harrowing time* wondering whether he’d insist on me interviewing him in his bedroom when this room seemed perfectly adequate. I’d almost made up my mind to slip quietly away when my interviewee returned, and I asked him why we couldn’t stay where we were. Pointing to

the cage in the corner, he said: 'It's the budgies, once we start talking, they'll chatter through the interview (Scott, 1984:170, italics added).

Foster offers a similar account, drawn from reflections on her research into generational attitudes to law and order. A male police officer invited her for a drink with his colleagues. Despite her protestations, he insisted on driving her to the pub. However, once in the car:

[he] asked whether I would mind dropping by his house on the way to the pub so that he could let his dog out. I agreed but became a little concerned when he told me that his wife and children were away for the weekend and that he had borrowed a friend's car especially for the evening. After a detour to his house we went to the pub. It was now evident that no other officers were coming for a drink and that I was in a strange pub some distance from home. The officer chatted freely and became very unguarded in his comments. He told me that he had checked up on me before inviting me for a drink (and had gone to considerable lengths to do so). *I was both extremely angry and frightened by this time...* I resolved the situation by talking about a 'partner' to whom I was very attached in order to reinforce my lack of interest in him (Foster, 1994:91-92, italics added).

These two accounts offer detailed and useful comment on how the actions of male interviewees and men encountered in the course of research can be frightening for female interviewers. However, both authors conclude their reflections in a way which parallels McKee and O'Brien's disappointing account. Scott reports: 'In the end the interview went without a hitch' (Scott, 1984:170). Foster explains: 'Eventually the PC drove me home

and I did not come to any harm' (Foster, 1994:92). It is, of course, part of the narrative of the accounts (and reassuring for the peace of mind of subsequent female researchers) for the authors to indicate that the worst possible scenario (rape, perhaps) did not occur. However, by focusing on what did *not* happen, Scott and Foster are perhaps overlooking what *did* happen in these situations. The interviews did not progress 'without a hitch' and the authors did 'come to harm'. For both women are very clearly reporting that these situations frightened them. There do not seem to be very persuasive reasons why Scott's interviewee could not have mentioned his budgie in his initial contact with her, or why the police officer Foster encountered could not have enquired whether she might like to accompany him on a date. That neither of these more straightforward scenarios took place is suggestive of the men's worrying ulterior motives to manoeuvre these researchers into bedrooms and cars. It is a sad reflection of the widespread underplaying of women's safety worries that researchers conclude their accounts of serious incidents by minimising their gravity. It is evident that women interviewers are caught in a no-win situation. For if we feared that something might happen and were wrong, our worries are characterised as an over-reaction; yet if we do not recognise the potential for trouble in a situation and trouble does occur, we will - of course - be blamed for failing to take precautions.

I am aware that some readers will be concerned by the prominence I am giving to vulnerability in this section. It may be said that my focus on this issue has arisen out of the subject of my research. Reviewing literature on male violence against women as a starting point for one's own research is, as Kelly (1988:15) has pointed out, a way to become even

more overwhelmed by the pervasiveness of male violence. I would argue, however, that my wariness of male informants is not just specific to my immersion in this particular research field. Instead it is a feature of many women's feelings about men, a consequence of men's continued abuse of women. Though it is well-documented that women have more to fear from men they know than from strangers, women often apply what they have learnt from specific incidents involving known men to a general distrust of all men. The comments of one of my female informants, who had experienced workplace sexual harassment some twenty years previously - in which men in a male-dominated office had discussed their sex lives in front of her - provide illustration of these points:

I've not actually shared an office with a man again. ... I just distrust them. I'm very, very nervous when they're around. I'm on edge the whole time, unless I know them very, very well, or if it's a friend of the family. But a male stranger, I go completely on edge. If one comes into my office, even, it makes me nervous.

A further female informant, a doctoral student in an education department, expanded upon this wariness many women feel about men. She explained how her mistrust of an academic was considerably heightened when she shifted from being a member of his seminar group to having to see him alone in his office for PhD supervision:

The minute I walked into his office I felt like I was being mentally undressed. I wasn't happy about that. I had sat in on one of his courses the year before, and had felt a bit like that then, but it didn't matter because I was just sitting in on a Master's course ... But as

soon as he became my supervisor... as soon as you walked in it was suddenly like a sexually charged atmosphere, and you'd think: 'I'm here to discuss my work' but you can't discuss your research when you don't know if he's going to say something or do something.

I discussed my reticence to interview men in private with several female informants (women who had been bullied by women, for example, as well as women who had been sexually harassed by men) and women friends. They all reassured me that they too would not feel happy about interviewing unknown men, in a private setting, with an agenda which included workplace sexual harassment. As one female informant said: 'They could have set anything up, you don't know what you're going into'. On the basis of women's knowledge about men, therefore, I decided to interview all male informants in public places. I made no distinctions on the grounds of whether the male informant identified himself as a 'victim' or perpetrator of harassment. For as Stanko (1994), in her reflections on feminist criminology, comments: 'distinguishing between the dangerous and not so dangerous men is extremely difficult' (Stanko, 1994:101). I was aware (and still remain concerned), however, that my decision robbed male informants of agency. I put my own wishes before the wishes of male informants. I seek to defend my action by stressing that all interviewers should be able to balance their own comfort with that of the interviewee.

Safety strategies

Illustrating the control that informants can exert over the interview, however, some male interviewees were not able or willing to give in to my decision to interview them in public. In total I interviewed nine men in private. My first private interview arose when a man rang me to volunteer his son for the research. The man said that his son could not come to the University because he was working and that he too had information for me. I felt, therefore, that I ought to go to the house to do the interview. After I had agreed to do so, I became very concerned about the risks involved in interviewing in a man's home, where 'he could have set anything up'. Unable to control the setting of the interview, I began to think about how to present myself in order to avoid the potential for trouble. McKee and O'Brien offer the following thoughts:

The researcher employed a variety of strategies to offset any risk of sexual confrontation: taking conscious decisions about make-up and clothes; and maintaining a 'professional' manner when ambiguities arose (McKee and O'Brien, 1983:158).

Reading this advice prior to accessing male informants who wanted to be interviewed in their own homes, I had viewed McKee and O'Brien's comments as simplistic. For they seem to imply that all men are uniform and can be deflected from sexual confrontation by their woman interviewer dressing in a sack. Male sexual attack on women is not related to whether the woman concerned is devastatingly attractive or whether the male attacker might perceive her to be so. However, with a one-to-one interview with a man looming, I realised that what is most important about changing one's appearance is not that it will be a fail-safe way to deflect a man from sexual interest, but that making the changes functions

as a psychological prop for the woman interviewer - it is a means of forgetting that rapists do not wear T-shirts marked 'rapist' and that they may even be turned on by an interviewer dressed in a sack. I did wonder whether I ought to 'get married' in order to interview men, for as Gutek (1985:58) comments in her study of sex and the workplace, women and men who do not belong to someone else are apparently perceived as fair game, but I was concerned that this would be deception and would prove difficult to sustain if someone started asking questions about my husband. Instead I concentrated on clothing. I dressed plainly and primly in trousers and a T-shirt buttoned up to the neck, and wore no jewellery or make-up. Though making an effort with one's appearance is usually done for oneself, some men may think otherwise, so my clothing told them that I had made no effort at all on their account. I carried a personal alarm (although I have to question its efficacy as once - while in the University - the alarm went off accidentally, and I had to run the length of a corridor and unlock a door before I could throw the contents of my bag on the floor to find and stop the alarm. I noted that while this was happening I heard someone observe, without any urgency: 'That sounds like an alarm', but that no-one came to see what was going on). Having altered my appearance and purchased an alarm, I felt that I had at least gone some way to minimising the potential for trouble and the threat of sanction if trouble did arise. For if I ended up raped or murdered no-one could say that I had been 'contributorially negligent'. I wore some variation of this interviewing 'uniform' for the majority of the interviews I carried out with men. As most of the interviews took place during a heatwave, when I would have preferred to have worn shorts, I often felt policed and hot. Paralleling my earlier observation that many women

are wary of men, I also have to question the uniqueness of my dress policing. A female informant, a Ph.D Physics student and research assistant, invited me to her University to tell me about her experiences of sexism in her male-dominated department. She told me, while wearing roughly the same outfit as I wore to interview men:

You feel uncomfortable with men, with the things you wear in summer. I wouldn't walk round during the day in shorts without feeling uncomfortable. I'd feel too conspicuous. My University is full of middle-aged men who haven't seen a pair of legs in a while. I'd perhaps go back in after tea with shorts on, when there are less people around.

On one occasion, however, my prim scruffiness nearly worked to my disadvantage. Jim - a technical officer who had been bullied by his manager - told me about his colleague, Thomas, whose flirtatious behaviour with women colleagues he supposed I might term as workplace sexual harassment. He rang Thomas and asked him if he would come down to be interviewed about his 'experiences of working with women'. Clearly illustrating some men's sexualisation of all women, Thomas asked: 'What does she look like? Is she nice?'. Jim said I was 'very nice', omitting to mention that I looked like I had been dressed by Oxfam. This situation illustrates the dilemma a woman interviewer can find herself in with regard to dress. She can either dress plainly to avoid the potential for trouble, or alternatively she can deck herself out in a 'feminine' fashion in order to access male informants.

Following McKee and O'Brien's (1983:158) advice to maintain 'a professional manner', in most cases I maintained a serious expression when interviewing men. An exception to this is the obligatory laughing at interviewees' jokes. Though, on one occasion - showing the difficulties of interviewing in distracting public places - I was interviewing a man in a crowded University bar, and I committed the unforgivable sin of not laughing at his joke, simply because I could not hear enough of it to catch on in time. I would argue, however, that when they are faced with male jokes in the context of interviews about sexual behaviour, women interviewers face a dilemma between 'appropriate' female innocence (which also has the effect of keeping the interview on a very professional level) and the job of maintaining 'rapport' with informants. For example, a male fire-fighter was telling me about sexual behaviour between fire-fighters, which he clearly found amusing:

There was one bloke who was renowned for getting his cock out, sticking it in people's ears and their faces, so that people would sort of vaguely wake up to see this horrific monster in their faces!

For the sake of facilitating the interview, the most appropriate strategy for a female interviewer to take is to laugh at this point. This is what I did (though with restraint). However, women also realise, as Cockburn (1991) observes in her study of men's resistance to equal opportunities, that 'a woman cannot operate by men's rules and get away with it' (Cockburn, 1991:156). When a woman laughs at a man's sexual joke she harms her reputation. Though this instance shows how humour around sexual subjects is male-defined, not maintaining a serious demeanour functioned on one occasion as a way

to subvert a male informant's sexism. Smart (1984) is right to point out that female interviewers may feel constrained not to jeopardise the interview by challenging sexist comments made by interviewees, but making a challenge should not just be conceptualised as telling the informant that his views are untenable. It is sometimes possible to keep the interview going while also clearly not agreeing with the views presented by an informant. Thomas told me how he liked to antagonise female colleagues and make them argue with him about 'the place of women in society'. I inadvertently broke the mould of his usual male/female interaction because instead of disagreeing with him, I found his opinions amusing:

Thomas: I'm a bit of a chauvinist really. Deborah: Are you? Thomas: Well, that's what they tell me. But I only do it jokingly. I tell them where women should be. I don't really mean it. I only do it to get them, to get their backs up. Deborah: You tell them that women aren't as good as men? Thomas: Yeah, I tell the truth [interviewer laughs; interviewee smiles; glint appears in his eye]. Yes, I often say that. I say that they're only good for three things in life - ironing, cooking, and in bed. That's my usual. But I only do it to get them... Deborah: You enjoy that? Thomas: Yeah. In fact, the more they respond the better.

Laughing inappropriately in this instance - which arose while Thomas was telling me that his behaviour towards his female colleagues could not be termed 'sexual harassment' because it was 'fun' - allowed me to very subtly challenge Thomas's views. The interaction also allowed me to guess how he might be getting away with such behaviour. I

would argue that being able to do so arose as a direct consequence of the different genders and shared heterosexuality of interviewer and interviewee. I had been informed that many of Thomas's female colleagues found him attractive. I was, therefore, surprised when he turned out to be quite unappealing - he was practically bald, he said he was in his 40s (but I thought he looked more like mid 50s), and was very shabbily dressed. I was puzzling over how such a man could be so attractive to women until the interchange reproduced above, when he smiled and his eyes lit up mischievously. His eyes were clearly the means by which he avoided being seen as a sexual harasser and was instead classified as a flirtatious man who liked to have fun at work. Though I am stressing the potential risks of woman-to-man interviewing in this section, I am not arguing against woman-to-man interviewing. This particular interview highlights why an implication of the undesirability of woman-to-man research must not be unproblematically drawn from a discussion of vulnerability. For in this case, my noting of how Thomas gets away with sexism might not have been so easily accessible to a heterosexual male researcher. This is important because finding out how men get away with sexism is a first step towards formulating strategies to stop them doing so.

Blind dates

Interviewing men in public can also present problems for female interviewers and male interviewees. Often when I interviewed men in public places we exchanged descriptions so that we would be able to recognise each other. On several occasions, however, male

informants either provided no description of themselves or a very sketchy one ('I'll be wearing green' (?) 'I look old and haggard'). When I went to interview Jim, we exchanged descriptions on the telephone before he came to the station to fetch me. While I had given a description of what I was wearing, Jim had merely told me that he was 6'2". Thus I had to eye up all the tall men who came past. Many were not very salubrious. Jim later told me that the town is a 'very dangerous place'. I would argue that having to eye up passing men to decide whether they are the informant being awaited is a particularly unattractive consequence of being reluctant to meet men in their homes - especially if the man is late, or fails to turn up at all. Staring hopefully at every passing male gives the impression that you are desperately trying to attract some male interest, or perhaps touting for custom. Walking around with a different man every day, and being seen 'socialising' in restaurants with quantities of men could also adversely affect a woman's reputation. Meeting publicly can be seen to give the interview the unwanted quality of a blind date. A female informant illustrated this possibility when she asked me, light-heartedly, if she should carry a newspaper, perhaps, or wear a pink carnation in her buttonhole when she came to meet me. Unsurprisingly perhaps, Thomas had also conceptualised the interview in this way. We met at the station and walked into the town centre to find a pub where we could talk. He held the pub door open for me: 'This is like a blind date, isn't it!', he giggled. He refused to let me pay for the drinks (he was the only male informant to do this), and when we were settled at a table (unfortunately right next to some sort of juke box, which activated itself unexpectedly and extremely loudly producing high-pitched chicken noises at two inopportune moments in our conversation) he commented:

When I come in here next time, the barmaids will be asking me who you were. They'll say: 'Who was that lady you were with on Friday? You're always in here with someone different! Was that your girlfriend?' ... no, [suddenly deflated tone of voice] they'll ask if you are my daughter.

Most of my male interviewees accepted that we would talk in public without comment. Though I feel that interviewing men in public is essential for the peace of mind of any female interviewer who feels uncomfortable with the thought of interviewing men privately, I was concerned that interviewing in public might harm the quality of interviewer/interviewee interaction and would not afford any opportunities to see reciprocity in action. Bergen (1993:206-7), referring to her research on women who had experiences of marital rape, comments that a special relationship was established when she interviewed women in their own homes. This was because the woman felt comfortable and in control of the situation. The interviewee, rather than the interviewer, set the agenda of the interaction. This reciprocity in interviews leads Finch to comment that the interviewer is being welcomed into the interviewee's home as a guest, not merely tolerated as an inquisitor (Finch, 1984:73). Though I agree that some interviewees may be more comfortable and feel more in control when being interviewed in their own homes, I would argue that taking male informants for a cup of tea in a restaurant can be seen as a welcoming, ice-breaking interaction which can establish a good relationship between interviewer and interviewee - it is an instance where the interviewer reciprocates for the information the interviewee is giving. My male informants often said that they liked being

treated to a cup of tea. They seemed to view our meeting as a social occasion, perhaps especially since several interviewees were unemployed because of the harassment they had suffered and therefore lacked the social opportunities they had enjoyed whilst at work. On one occasion a man chivalrously carried the tray to our table, and on most occasions the location of the table was a matter of informal negotiation between myself and the informant on the basis of where seemed like a quiet place to sit.

Reciprocity is not, however, just about the giving and receiving of cups of tea. Instead it relates to reciprocity of information. At the outset of my research I worried about how I ought to react if a self-confessed sexual harasser asked me where I lived. How would I be able to show reciprocity whilst also ensuring my own safety? To explore this concern I corresponded with a female researcher who had carried out interviews with men accused of workplace sexual harassment. She explained that she had kept the exchange of personal information to a minimum (Watson, 1995). Watson's response clearly shows that feminists should not seek to establish rules about reciprocity of information in interviews. For, paralleling many conversations in everyday life, what is revealed and concealed by interviewer and interviewee in an interview situation is related to a consideration of what purpose responses may be used for. In my interviews, fortunately, the need to weigh up risk and reciprocity rarely arose. Men and women seldom asked direct questions about my personal life. They even more rarely enquired about any personal experiences of harassment I might have. Instead, most of my informants preferred to concentrate firmly on the injustice of their own experience.

The first public interview I carried out took place in a fairly upmarket restaurant on the University of Warwick campus. When I had been there before it had always seemed quiet. The first time I went there with an informant, however, it was full of people. This sharply drew out the question of risks for informants - for in this case some of the man's information was extremely sensitive. David explained that if anyone found out that he had told me that a colleague had threatened him with a gun in the factory where he had been working 'we could both go to prison'. David sat down next to a fountain/place where people collect trays and cans of lemonade. This produced unfortunate background noises of people talking, trays crashing and water flowing. However, though the restaurant was full, because of the placing of tables and the acoustics of the room, it was possible to have a private conversation. Had this informant expressed reservations about talking in public, I would of course have taken him to my office. I would, however, have wanted to take the precaution of telling someone that I had taken him there.

Subtle sexual harassment and gender sensitivity

While interviewing David, the batteries in my tape recorder ran out. Pointing out that he had plenty of free time, having been dismissed from the job where he was harassed, he agreed to come back another day. On the day of our second appointment David was late arriving, and to save time he drove straight up to the building where I was waiting instead of going to the car park first. He said that he would have to park his car. I directed him to

a multi-storey car park. He claimed not to understand my directions and suggested: 'Why don't you hop in and show me?'. I declined and repeated the directions, stressing how easy it would be to find the car park. He did not push any further. I worried about whether I had offended him. I had avoided meeting him in my office, yet meeting him in public had presented me with a further problem. I decided that I had not been over-sensitive, instead he had been very gender-insensitive. At the end of his interview David went to shake my hand (which he had done on arrival and departure on the last occasion and on arrival this time). He had previously shook hands for a usual amount of time, but this time - the end of our last scheduled meeting - he took my hand, did not shake it, but simply held it and held it for too long. He was encouraging me to attend one of his union meetings, to which he offered to transport me (he seemed very keen, therefore, to get me into his car). I started to pull away after the usual amount of time, but he had a tight hold on my hand. When he finally let go I made for the nearest washbasin. Thus, though the prospect of interviewing a man in private had been the part of the fieldwork that had worried me the most at the outset, the two occasions where a male interviewee made me feel uncomfortable during the research took place in public. Instead of concluding that my aversion to interviewing in private was, therefore, misplaced, I would argue that risk can instead be seen as potentially present in public as well as in private. I would add that these incidents also usefully show how substantive data and methodology are inextricably linked. For though the examples detailed arise out of my experiences of interviewing, they are also illustrations of the phenomenon under consideration in my research. David's actions constitute some very subtle forms of harassment that men can perpetrate against women.

He made me feel uncomfortable. This clearly contests the feminist assumption that interviewers always have more power than interviewees.

In contrast to David, other male interviewees showed a delightfully high level of gender sensitivity towards my position as a lone female interviewer. I would hope that they apply this sensitivity to all their interactions with women. When Jim and I discussed the arrangements for our meeting at his workplace a long way from my University, he said that he would 'collect' me from the railway station, because security at his workplace is tight and I would not gain access unless he accompanied me. The idea of being 'collected' worried me, as it might imply that he would come by car and expect me to get in to it. When I rang him from the railway station to say that I had arrived, however, he said that he would 'walk up and fetch me'. Whether advertent or inadvertent, this is clearly the sort of sensitivity which men must be encouraged to show towards women in general and lone women interviewers in particular. When I spoke to another male informant who lived outside Coventry, he too said that he could come and pick me up from the station. He said that he would take me to his house. He added that his wife would be there, but I concluded that the promise of her being in the house when I arrived was not a good enough guarantee of safety. I asked if there was a café we could go to instead. When I arrived Robert introduced me to his eleven year old daughter. He said that he had realised that I was worried about going in his car to his house, and had brought his daughter along 'to make you feel safer'. We went into the café in the station to talk. Though it was quite embarrassing that my concern had been so transparent, Robert's action showed

considerable thoughtfulness, for which I thanked him when I sent back papers he allowed me to photocopy. The location of this interview and the presence of an eleven year old girl did, however, cause me some problems. We had already got some way into the interview when train announcements started booming round the café. Though the train announcements could be heard too perfectly, somehow the acoustics of the cafe meant that the informant and I could hardly hear each other. When we spoke loudly I was conscious of people at adjoining tables staring and listening in. I was lucky that Robert said that he had no problem in publicly discussing his experiences of being accused by male shopfloor colleagues of child abuse and rape. Having an eleven year old girl at the interview - even though Robert said that we could talk about his experience in front of her because she had heard it already - made me wary of asking for examples of the sorts of sexual things the men accused Robert of. However, though the daughter's presence hindered that aspect of the interview, it facilitated a further topic of conversation. She was keen - towards the end of the interview - to take part, commenting: 'I was affected too'. This drew Robert onto telling me more about the effect the harassment had had on his family. I do not believe that Jim and Robert engaged in these forms of gender sensitivity primarily in order to make a favourable impression on me which they hoped would give further weight to their accounts of workplace harassment. Though they may, of course, have viewed this as one outcome of their actions, I think they would have viewed such strategies as unnecessary. For having previously rehearsed their experiences to sympathetic family, friends and colleagues, both men had become very confident of the persuasive nature of their detailed and thoughtful accounts of what had happened to them.

Summary

In this section, I have begun to uncover some of the distinctive character of woman-to-man interviewing. I hope to have persuaded readers that the woman-to-man interview is worthy of much more sustained analysis than it has received so far in feminist theorising on the research process. In the course of my analysis here, I have shown how maintaining rapport becomes complicated when sex is the subject of cross-gender discussions, how the means by which reciprocity is achieved are altered when the interviewee and interviewer are of different genders and how male informants can seek to take control of the dynamics of the interview either in ways which are unwelcome to the female interviewer or in a more welcome fashion which nevertheless still underlines how dependent a female interviewer's perception of her personal safety can be on the actions of her male informant. In locating interviewer vulnerability at the centre of my analysis, I have not intended to be alarmist. Instead, voicing concerns that are presently largely unspoken, my intention has been to create space for woman interviewers to reflect openly on their experiences of cross-gender research, without feeling inhibited by currently-prevailing and constraining interviewing advice which prescribes always considering the informant's wishes before one's own - even if this means a woman feeling obliged to talk to an unknown male informant in his bedroom. While it may be said that my focus on vulnerability has arisen because my research on workplace harassment 'introduce[s] sex into the conversation' (Kitzinger, 1994:135), I argue that it is equally salient to place the

potential risks of woman-to-man interviewing in the context of many women's well-founded distrust of men in everyday life. This theme of cross-gender distrust could be usefully further explored by men reflecting upon their experiences of researching and being at work with women. For within universities for example, one hears anecdotal evidence that some male lecturers now feel the need to leave their office doors open when conducting conversations with female students. I wonder, therefore, how many male sociologists (perhaps paralleling some female colleagues who might avoid interviewing men because of personal safety fears) might have confined their research to people of their own sex because one-to-one interactions may create the conditions for accusations of sexual harassment? All this said, however, an emphasis on interviewer vulnerability sits very uneasily alongside the feminist interviewer's ethical responsibilities to interviewees. For while interviewing a man in his own home or a private office may place women interviewers in potentially dangerous situations, conducting interviews in public places raises difficulties for male informants who may not want their experiences to be overheard. In the short term, I would argue that women interviewers must exercise the level of caution which makes them feel safe - even when other women and men may view their caution as an over-reaction. As a long-term aim, however, feminists must develop sophisticated strategies to recognise both the safety of interviewers and the vulnerability of informants. One way in which this might be achieved could be by a more widespread use of the two interviewers/one informant model of interviewing. This strategy - whereby one interviewer keeps track of the research agenda whilst the other concentrates on exploring points which emerge as being of importance to the informant as the account develops -

could be employed as a personal safety device for interviewers. I would suggest that many informants would not be inhibited by this approach, even when they are discussing 'sensitive' topics. People who responded to my appeals for research participants said that they did so because they wanted their experiences to be used to highlight the forms of injustice they had suffered. They wanted to be listened to non-judgementally, without interruption and with interest. There is no reason to suppose that the presence of two interviewers would adversely affect the fulfilment of these expectations.

The data analysis process

Transcription

I fully transcribed each interview. At the beginning of each transcription, I allocated a pseudonym to the informant. After completing each transcript, I began altering details which might identify the informant. (I have continued to alter details to preserve informants' anonymity while writing chapters.) While transcribing, I underlined sections of the interview transcript which I thought were pertinent to my research questions as well as recurrent themes and sections which I felt opened up new areas for analysis. Thus, while full transcription is exceedingly time-consuming, I feel that doing so is an invaluable part of the research process. At this early stage, I highlighted the following: (i) examples (standard and non-standard) of workplace sexual harassment, sexism, 'sledgehammer' bullying and 'dripping tap' bullying; (ii) incidents which captured the 'career' of each informant's experience (how the workplace harassment commenced, evolved and

concluded); (iii) the gendered character of men's and women's experiences; (iv) incidents/observations which highlighted the differences and similarities between workplace sexual harassment, sexism and bullying; (v) how and why men's and women's workplace harassment complaints were (mis)handled by their employers/trade unions; (vi) the distinctiveness of the informants' workplace (e.g. multiple harassments operating in one site); (vii) the distinctiveness of the informant's occupation (e.g. job insecurity); and (viii) how informants sought to justify their interpretation of incidents as workplace sexual harassment, sexism or bullying.

Writing up

As mentioned above, writing up is an active process of rethinking and analysis. To illustrate this here, I will highlight two themes: (i) working on experience; and (ii) developing originality. After completing transcription, I prepared several discussion papers as a way of articulating and deepening my analysis. As I began to do this, I considered how to analyse women's (and men's) experiences. The emergence of second wave feminism through 'consciousness raising' led to 'experience' becoming one of the key concepts in feminist research (see Smith, 1986). As such, 'experience' is worth exploring in detail. Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994), in reflections upon researching young women's sexuality, say that there are three positions which can be taken in producing more or less valid conclusions from interviews. One of these positions argues that the data produced by researchers can be regarded as directly reflecting an unproblematic reality.

Oakley (1981), for example, assumed that a woman interviewer would be able to fully capture another woman's experiences. Such an assumption has subsequently been problematised. Indeed, at the opposite extreme from this first position, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994:144) describe a position which states that an interview is a specific account given to a particular interviewer at a particular moment: we cannot take these texts as in any way accessing reality. Wise and Stanley (1990:27) say that such feminist scepticism of all universalising claims has given rise to this 'feminist postmodernist' epistemology. As Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994:144) explain, this recognises that as women's lives are contradictory and that therefore feminism itself should be fragmented, plural and multiplex. However, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994:144) reject 'feminist postmodernism' because to treat what people say to interviewers as simply textual leaves researchers unable to show how they have come to any conclusions.

The final position which Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994:145) discuss offers a helpful middle way between the two positions discussed above. This position claims that there is some level of reality which can be accessed through people's accounts. Indeed, Maynard (1994:23) observes there is no such thing as raw experience anyway. She says that the very act of speaking about experience is to culturally and discursively constitute it. (This will be demonstrated in Chapter 5.) Maynard (1994:23) reports that feminists have discussed the role of the researcher in interpreting informants' experiences and that some have suggested that to do anything other than simply let women speak for themselves constitutes a violation. While some feminist researchers have, therefore, sought to do

research 'with' informants, only one of my informants asked to see what I wrote about him before including it in my PhD or published work. (As this informant's account does not appear in my PhD or, as yet, in my published work, I have not gone back to him for feedback.) However, Maynard makes the important point that although women's knowledge may constitute a starting point for the production of feminist knowledge, it is not sufficient for understanding the processes and practices through which this is organised. She argues that feminism has an obligation to go beyond citing experience in order to make connections which may not be visible from the purely experiential level alone (Maynard, 1994:23-24). Nevertheless, Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994:145) explain that there is no precise solution as to exactly how a level of reality can be accessed through people's accounts and 'ultimately we do not know whether or not we have done it': 'our conclusions should always be open to criticism' (Holland and Ramazanoglu, 1994:146). This final position is the approach of this research.

After completing a number of discussion papers, I began to develop thesis chapters. As I had interviewed fewer workplace sexual harassment victims than workplace bullying victims, I thought that I would be able to include all fifteen workplace sexual harassment victims' accounts in my thesis. I did almost do so: only two male university lecturers who felt that they had been wrongly accused of sexually harassing women undergraduate students and a male union official who had been involved in representing a male university lecturer accused of sexual harassment - who were excluded because I did not have sufficient data to generalise about these contentious experiences - and two women PhD

students harassed by their supervisor - see below for a discussion of why these informants were excluded - were not finally included in the thesis. I had conducted thirty-five interviews on the subject of workplace bullying and in fourteen of these accounts workers said that they had experienced sustained campaigns of workplace bullying by line managers which resulted in their dismissal or resignation. As I wanted to trace the 'career' of this frequent type of workplace bullying, this meant that I had to choose a small number of accounts to analyse as illustrative examples. All the accounts were interesting and worth analysing in detail but I finally chose to focus on the six examples discussed in Chapter 6 because they offered the opportunity to compare managerial/professional employees' experiences of workplace bullying with subordinate employees' experiences of workplace bullying. Though gender dynamics were present in all the workplace bullying interviews, the three accounts analysed in Chapter 7 were finally chosen because they had not been mentioned in depth in Chapters 5 and 6. Furthermore, the woman informant, in particular, stressed the salience of gender to her experiences of workplace bullying and indeed this was equally apparent in the men's accounts. Given the constraints of space, a discussion of two informants' accounts of school bullying and an analysis of workplace bullying experiences which informants had observed rather than experienced themselves were not pursued.

My first chapter analysed women workers' definitions of workplace sexual harassment and sexism. While writing the first draft of this chapter, however, I became aware of the difficulty of making 'original' contributions on a subject which has been the focus of

feminist enquiry for over twenty years. This is, of course, not to say that there are now few discoveries which can be made in this field. Instead, what I want to argue is that the project of juxtaposing a type of workplace harassment named in the 1970s (workplace sexual harassment) and a type of workplace harassment named in the 1990s (workplace bullying) presents particular problems for PhD research. Hughes (1994:41), in reflections on her PhD research on stepfamilies, observes that the concept 'original' (necessary for the award of the PhD) can be so diffuse, one's search for it becomes a quest in itself. In my case, I think that my concern to offer an astoundingly 'original' contribution to the workplace sexual harassment debate was heightened, perhaps even caused, by the obvious 'originality' of *any* contribution to the workplace bullying debate.

This fixation with 'originality' had an effect on the second chapter I drafted for my PhD (which is not now part of my PhD). This chapter was planned to offer an analysis of the dynamics of sexual harassment in a specific work context. I consciously sought to choose a work context which had never previously been explored by feminist social scientists. Two of my interviewees had been women postgraduates sexually harassed by their PhD supervisor. A review of literature on postgraduate education and training and sexual harassment on campus revealed that neither feminist social scientists nor sociologists/psychologists of education had considered the dynamics of sexual harassment in this academic context. I realised that a chapter exploring this topic would, therefore, offer a new contribution to the sexual harassment debate.

Later, however, I wondered whether a chapter exploring students' experiences of academic sexual harassment should be included in a study of harassment in paid work. At this point, I had realised that 'originality' may be achieved through the cumulative development of an overall analysis which takes the debate forward and not simply through the capture of a fresh 'object' of research. Thus, finally, and reluctantly as I had spent a considerable amount of time investigating the dynamics of sexual harassment in PhD supervision, I concluded that the chapter should be removed from the thesis. This did not mean, however, that I rejected the political importance of highlighting and analysing sexual harassment in PhD supervision. Indeed, I presented a paper on the subject of sexual harassment in PhD supervision at the first annual conference of the National Harassment Network Higher and Further Education Branch (see Lee, 1997a). When this conference began to be publicised, I was contacted by the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and commissioned to write an article on the difficulties of student-supervisor interaction (Lee, 1997b). For the conference, I produced a hand-out summarising the key arguments of my paper. Afterwards, a member of my audience told me that she knew a male lecturer who was sexually harassing his PhD students. She said that she would place my hand-out in his pigeonhole, in order to try to make him re-assess his conduct. Subsequently, the aborted thesis chapter has become a journal article (Lee, 1998).

Conclusions

Phizacklea and Wolkowitz (1995:44) observe that more open and frank accounts of how research is done are much needed. This chapter, therefore, has offered a contribution to this project by providing an analysis of my experiences of doing feminist research on women's and men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying. The development of my research proposal has been explained. My discussion of research methods has detailed the biases that are inevitably entailed by seeking to recruit informants through a press release which highlighted 'workplace bullying' and did not, for example, mention racism. I have shown that recruiting informants for a study of 'sensitive' topics is so difficult that it is impossible to obtain a representative sample. My discussion of dealing with the media has illustrated how the ways in which research is presented by the media, which are often outside the researcher's control, has an effect on the number of informants recruited. The way in which my search for 'originality' resulted in a rather detached thesis chapter has been detailed. This has been recorded not merely to illustrate the dead-ends and U-turns of the project, but in order to explain how these dead-ends and U-turns led me to refine the focus of my thesis.

A significant concern of the chapter has been to challenge the notion that feminist research cannot include men as victims. Instead, I have argued that not only can such men have a place in contemporary feminist research but that they must have a place in contemporary feminist research. I justify this assertion by reference to, for example, Schacht and Ewing (1997) and Stanko (1994). Schacht and Ewing's (1997) analysis of men's studies texts, for example, highlights the dangers of leaving the study of men to 'men's studies'.

Stanko's (1994) discussion of doing feminist research on man-to-man violence, however, in which she poses the question 'to what extent does the knowledge about gendered violences pave the way for a clearer understanding about the violence women face in their daily lives?' (Stanko, 1994:103) supplies a much more positive reason for doing feminist research on men's experiences of oppression. My experiences of interviewing men shows that the process of a woman researching men is not, however, uncontentious.

Chapter Three

Women's Definitions of Unwanted Male Sexual Conduct at Work

Introduction

How do women workers conceptualise male-perpetrated 'sexual harassment'? What does this suggest about the achievements and limitations of the workplace sexual harassment discourse? Are there male-perpetrated experiences which women workers do not interpret as 'sexual harassment' but nevertheless still perceive as 'unwanted sexual conduct' (Rubenstein, 1992)? How might an analysis of such experiences strengthen the workplace sexual harassment discourse?

In this chapter, to explore these research questions, I draw on ten of the qualitative interviews which I conducted with women workers. The emphasis of my analysis is on women's definitions of unwanted male sexual conduct in the workplace. I have chosen this focus because while the definition of sexual harassment has always been a key concern for feminists (e.g. Wise and Stanley, 1987) who seek to provide women with a political vocabulary with which to resist male oppression, recent contributors to the rethinking sexual harassment debate (e.g. Brant and Too, 1994; Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997) have begun to express concern about how sexual harassment is being defined.

The analysis of the data produced in my interviews is divided into two sections. In the first section of the chapter, I discuss male-perpetrated experiences which seven women

workers defined unproblematically as workplace sexual harassment. My central focus here is an analysis of the achievements of the workplace sexual harassment discourse, but I also explore the limitations of this discourse. As statistical surveys consistently demonstrate the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment (see Collier, 1995 for numerous examples), this emphasis may seem unnecessarily sanguine. My intention, however, is to supply a counterpoint to recent pessimistic and alarmist assertions that although a key achievement of second wave feminism was to single out sexual harassment as a part of women's personal everyday experience and to give it a political definition and name:

Many women (and even more men) have never - despite all the policies, codes of conduct and legislative apparatus - accepted this feminist redefinition of women's experiences [i.e. that unwanted sexual conduct is sexual harassment]' (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:8).

This observation provides one explicit rationale for Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997) edited collection of feminist perspectives on sexual harassment. As such, in Part I of the book, four contributors - Herbert; Nicolson; Mott and Condor; and Cairns - explore women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct as 'sexual harassment'. (This theme seems to be becoming increasingly popular. For example, it is also discussed by Monson, 1997, in an edited collection focusing on 'everyday sexism' (Ronai et al, 1997).) Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997) introductory chapter explains why this particular emphasis has been chosen. They note, for example, that whereas 49 per cent of the women interviewed in a survey carried out by the Canadian Human Rights Commission reported one or more instances of 'unwanted sexual attention', only 30 per cent of them (i.e. 15 per cent of the

total number of women interviewed) identified their experience as sexual harassment (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:9). Thomas and Kitzinger observe that had the only question asked been 'have you ever experienced sexual harassment?', the number of positive responses would have provided a serious underestimate of the actual number of women suffering unwanted sexual attention (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:9). They say that while the majority of women and men now recognise 'sledgehammer' (Wise and Stanley, 1987) sexual harassment as unacceptable, there remains widespread resistance to the idea that 'dripping tap' (Wise and Stanley, 1987) behaviours, e.g. personal remarks, off-colour jokes and ogling, might also constitute sexual harassment (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:13). This resistance is understood as problematic because interpreting all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment has an important campaigning value: it provides a vocabulary which may extend the legitimacy of critique from what is less contentiously seen as wrong to more contentious conduct.

A second explicit rationale for Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997) book is their assessment of the strength of the current anti-feminist backlash. They report, for example, that students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology burned copies of the booklet *Dealing with Harassment at MIT*, which they described as a total abrogation of free expression (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:6). Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:13) explain that incidents such as this have arisen because while many broadly 'liberal feminist' views are now widely accepted in western societies and are no longer identified as 'feminist', sexual harassment is still perceived as a 'feminist' concept: in this so-called 'post-feminist' era,

the term 'feminist' is reserved for those ideas associated with more radical feminist politics and hence remains a marker of unacceptability. Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:7) say that women whom they perceive as spokespersons for the anti-feminist backlash (who nevertheless often define themselves as feminists, e.g. Roiphe, 1994) are trying to redefine most experiences that women may define as 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life' (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:7). Roiphe (1994:104) in fact sees only quid pro quo incidents as sexual harassment and argues that women ought to be able to deal with the more everyday forms of unwanted male sexual conduct such as staring or sexual innuendoes (Roiphe, 1994:101). Roiphe's critique demonstrates how a wide definition of what counts as sexual harassment may be used to seek to undermine the feminist sexual harassment discourse.

In the second section of this chapter, I make an intervention into this current anti-feminist backlash debate by analysing experiences three of my women informants (one of whom had also encountered experiences she defined as 'sexual harassment') presented to me as 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment' rather than as 'sexual harassment' (and briefly cite two more accounts in which women defined experiences as sexism), even though these experiences did appear consistent with arguably widely accepted definitions of what counts as sexual harassment (e.g. Rubenstein, 1992). In these interviews, I was concerned to discover why women had rejected the interpretation 'sexual harassment' and as such, a significant part of each interview focused on how the women defined 'sexual harassment' and in what ways they felt that their own experiences

did not fit into this definition. Herbert (1997:26) would perceive these women's accounts as indicating 'how widespread is the ignorance of women and girls about what constitutes sexual harassment'. Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:13) would highlight women's reluctance to identify themselves with a 'feminist' concept in the context of an anti-feminist backlash. Mott and Condor (1997) would say that sexual harassment has become so routine that it is invisible and Cairns (1997) would argue that women have accommodated to male-defined norms of femininity and have consequently developed a very circumscribed sense of personal agency. My argument, however, is that the existence of alternative interpretations for unwanted male sexual conduct suggests that 'sexual harassment' needs to be understood as only one of many meaningful interpretations for unwanted male sexual conduct at work. While a more complex set of labels, less directly associated with an established wrong, may initially appear to lose some campaigning power, I think that a recognition of a range of terms for unwanted male sexual conduct may actually gain campaigning power against the anti-feminist backlash's unnecessarily sharp division between experiences which can be defined as 'sexual harassment' and experiences which are 'just part of everyday life' (e.g. Roiphe, 1994). For even when women understand experiences as 'sexism', for example, rather than 'sexual harassment', they are still emphasising the unacceptability of unwanted male sexual conduct in the workplace. Indeed, the participation of these three informants in my research demonstrates that they had taken the experiences they described very seriously.

My ten informants are nearly all the fifteen interviewees who came forward to tell me about their experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. (The experiences of the two women students who encountered sexual harassment in PhD supervision are analysed separately in Lee, 1997a; 1997b; and 1998, given that the women are not paid workers and do not, therefore, fit in with the emphasis of this study on sexual harassment and bullying in paid employment. The three remaining interviewees whose experiences are not included here were two male university lecturers who said that they had been wrongly accused of sexually harassing women undergraduate students and a male union official who had been involved in a university sexual harassment case. These experiences are not analysed in this chapter as my focus here is on women victims of workplace sexual harassment.) The interviewees whose accounts are discussed in this chapter constitute a quite representative sample of women workers because the women are employed in a wide variety of occupations and include workers in their late-teens to mid-50s. All the women are white, however, and none identified themselves as lesbian. They are: Clare, a single 17 year old junior secretary in a factory; Ann, a married customer helpline operator in her 30s who had previously worked as a clerical assistant; Penny, a single 22 year old office clerk in a light engineering factory who had previously worked as a barmaid; Helen, a married psychiatric nurse in her early 40s; Kathryn, a single 32 year old Personal Assistant to a financial manager; Lisa, a 50 year old married catering assistant who has two children; Jackie, a 30 year old married secretary; Elizabeth, a single 21 year old office junior in a travel agency; Louise, a single 25 year old physics research assistant registered for a PhD;

and Joanna, a single 30 year old teacher in a special school who had previously worked as a sales assistant.

‘[A male co-worker] said, “Can I give you a kiss for Christmas?”. I said, “No” and he said, “Go on”, and he shoved me against the wall. ...I kicked him in the leg!’: Women’s interpretations of workplace sexual harassment

My analysis in this section draws on the seven interviews which I conducted with women who said that they and/or their female co-workers had encountered workplace sexual harassment. The sexual harassment the women experienced included the following representative examples: men viewing/reading pornography in front of them - ‘[Male co-worker] would read things out - like the *Sunday Sport* and stuff like that. Really rude stuff. And read out of lewd magazines: “Look at these tits!”’ (Ann, customer helpline operator); men talking about their sex lives either to women or within earshot of women - ‘[A group of men] used to spend most of their working day talking about their wives, and what had happened the night before [i.e. their sex lives]’ (Clare, junior secretary); men’s jokes at the expense of women - ‘I was on the telephone ordering from a supplier, and I was trying to be very competent and very organised, and there were people in the shop ... [the shop owner] sort of came up behind me and sort of put his arms around me and was pretending to have anal sex with me and he was laughing about it’ (Joanna, sales assistant); victimisation following non-enjoyment of sexual jokes - [The chef] used to quote a comedian’s crude jokes. He said “fuck” all the time. He was saying that “it’s just a way of talking” ...He decided to fire some people. ...All the ones that went were the ones

that hadn't liked his [sexual] approaches' (Lisa, catering assistant); men directing personal and sexual questions and comments at women - '[Male patients] say things like: "Why are all the nice nurses married?"', I've been followed round for a whole shift: "Why won't you sleep with me?"' (Helen, psychiatric nurse); men verbally pressuring women for unwanted dates/sexual contact - 'It sort of started off with questions like: "Do you have a boyfriend?", how [line manager] could see my knees if I sat in a particular way. It got up to, after a couple of weeks, did I want to go out with him at the weekend?' (Kathryn, Personal Assistant to a financial manager); and men sexually attacking women - 'Another incident was where one [male co-worker] had too much to drink at a Christmas party, and decided that he wanted a kiss at Christmas. He said, "Can I give you a kiss for Christmas?". I said, "No" and he said, "Go on", and he shoved me against the wall' (Clare, junior secretary); 'At a Christmas party, [the managing director] decided that I was going to sleep with him' (Penny, office clerk).

The importance of the workplace sexual harassment discourse

These seven informants defined a wide range of unwanted male sexual conduct at work as 'sexual harassment'. This demonstrates a clear achievement of the workplace sexual harassment discourse: twenty years of feminist and trade union activism and media reports have been effective in showing many women what sorts of experiences may be interpreted as workplace sexual harassment. One representative example is the workplace harassment pamphlet which USDAW send to members. This defines workplace sexual harassment as for example 'unnecessary touching or unwanted physical contact; suggestive remarks or

other verbal abuse; leering and other sexually intimidating actions; compromising invitations; demands for sexual favours; and physical assault' (USDAW, nd:4). None of these interviewees expressed any hesitation in interpreting their experiences as workplace sexual harassment: no-one, for example, asked me whether or not I agreed that they had been sexually harassed. This is perhaps because their experiences so closely accorded with now widely understood conceptualisations of workplace sexual harassment such as that given in the USDAW pamphlet quoted above.

The women's confidence in interpreting their experiences as 'sexual harassment' is, nevertheless, still very significant. Thomas and Kitzinger (1994:152) argue that the label 'sexual harassment' is one that many women are reluctant to employ in talking about their experiences because a woman's subjective interpretation of a given incident is liable to be governed by her construction of the underlying intentions of the other. None of my informants, however, even so much as speculated that, 'what had happened must have been unintentional and that "he can't have meant it like that"' (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1994:154). Though many of the women said that they felt that their sexual harassers had deliberately set out to humiliate them, I think that the absence of any doubts about men's intentions is underpinned by the growing importance of the feminist understanding of sexual harassment which stresses that whether or not sexual harassment has taken place is in the 'eye of the beholder' i.e. 'intent is constructed by the [women] recipients of behaviours' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:158). Indeed, this interpretation has been stressed, for example, in a self-help book on workplace sexual harassment (Curtis, 1993:20),

written to accompany the BBC television series *Making Advances*. The European Commission's Code of Practice also now agrees that, 'it is for each individual to determine what behaviour is acceptable to them and what they regard as offensive' (quoted in Collier, 1995:3). Consequently, women are recognising that their interpretation of unwanted sexual conduct matters.

The women's conceptualisation of the experiences described above as unacceptable conduct is perhaps underpinned by the growing currency of the feminist interpretation that unwanted male sexual conduct as an expression of male power rather than sexual attraction. In the 1980s, Wise and Stanley (1987:41-44) criticised the composite trade union definition of sexual harassment because, in addition to conceptualising sexual harassment as a 'workplace' problem, it saw sexual harassment as (i) a 'unisex' problem, with both women and men as victims; (ii) a 'sexual' problem i.e. sex in the wrong place; and (iii) a product of 'hierarchy' because men exploit positions in organisational hierarchies to obtain sex from subordinates. However, more recent trade union definitions of workplace sexual harassment seem to be much more informed by feminist thinking. Though I do not wish to present one example as representative of all trade unions, the NATFHE workplace sexual harassment document, for instance, says that:

Sexual harassment is often linked with power and is not necessarily about sexual desire. Harassment can be a way of asserting superiority, of 'keeping women in their place'. Men's perception of their status (economic or otherwise) in the workplace may be threatened by women and they may endeavour to exert control by such an abuse of power.

The victim is often junior to the harasser.... A man can harass a woman in a higher status job to undermine her authority or make her less able to carry out her duties well (NATFHE, 1994:5).

Recent self-help texts on workplace sexual harassment have also stressed that most sexual harassment victims are women (Curtis, 1993:11) and that the intention of the harasser(s) 'is often not necessarily sexual - rather their aim may be to humiliate or torment a woman' (Curtis, 1993:19) and that 'the blame for sexual harassment lies with male power in society and with male views about women, as well as with the attitudes of organisations and individuals' (Curtis, 1993:29). Perhaps as a result of the mainstreaming of these feminist ideas, my informants did not always conceptualise sexual harassment as a unisex, sexual problem perpetrated by male workers in higher organisational positions than their female victims. Joanna, for instance, said that she felt very strongly that men workers could not encounter workplace sexual harassment. She explained that although she knew that men could experience humiliating sexual initiation rituals in factories, this could not be interpreted as workplace sexual harassment because, 'I think that sexual harassment is primarily about affirming virile manhood vis-à-vis a heterosexual woman, making themselves feel like big men'. Joanna was also concerned to stress that sexual harassment is not simply a 'workplace' problem. She explained that at the time when she had been working in the shop where she had encountered sexual harassment, she had been living in a shared house:

There was this really creepy bloke who lived there and one night he came into my bedroom and said, 'I'm feeling really ill. Can I get into your bed?' and I said, 'No, go away', and managed to get him out of my bedroom. Another time, I was in the bath and he came to the door and said, 'Can I come in?' and I said, 'No, go away, I'm in the bath'. He said, 'Let me in', and started hassling me again. So sexual harassment at work, you need to see that for a lot of women it isn't discrete entities, it's global, in many areas of life.

Many of my women interviewees said that they did not perceive their sexual harassers to be expressing sexual desire for them, even when their experiences did involve sexual propositions. Kathryn, for example, said that:

[The financial manager] was tremendously emotional - loved getting an emotional response out of people. It's what he thrived on. He wanted people to be either shouting for joy all the time, or crying. ...And if you aren't reacting like that, and I don't like reacting like that, he used to get very, very annoyed. ...And I think it may be because of that that he started to proposition me. ...I think he was just diving straight for the sex angle because then you're guaranteed an emotional reaction because it's an emotional thing.

The women, then, were interpreting workplace sexual harassment as men's desire to control women. If Kathryn had been 'shouting for joy or crying' all the time, i.e. conforming to the way in which her line manager wanted women employees to behave, then she might not have subsequently encountered sexual propositions. Although most of the women I interviewed had experienced workplace sexual harassment from a man who

occupied a superior organisational position to their own, it is significant that Ann and Clare interpreted unwanted sexual conduct perpetrated by male co-workers as sexual harassment and Helen described the conduct of patients (who are not paid workers) as sexual harassment. All the examples mentioned above demonstrate that women are taking control of the definition of sexual harassment in ways which are made available by feminist analyses.

My interviewees' confidence in deploying the term 'sexual harassment' to interpret their experiences is perhaps particularly striking because all of the women work in traditionally female jobs. Stanko (1988:96) observed, drawing from the findings of the Leeds TUCRIC study (1983) which found that 96 per cent of women in non-traditional spheres versus 48 per cent of women in traditionally female dominated spheres of employment experienced forms of workplace sexual harassment ranging from leering to actual sexual assault, that 'women in traditional employment may assume that being annoyed or bothered in these jobs is part of the job'. My informants did not assume that 'being annoyed or bothered' is 'part of the job'. Of course, many of the women did observe that the workplace sexual harassment they encountered was related to the work context where it took place. For example, Clare explained: I think a lot of [sexual harassment]'s got to do with a factory environment. You can't even walk through machine shops in a factory, they'll all clap when you walk through'. This did not, however, prevent the women from interpreting their experiences as sexual harassment. My informants came forward to be interviewed

because they had interpreted the particular experiences they had encountered as unacceptable workplace conduct.

This interpretation of unwanted male sexual conduct as ‘unacceptable’ rather than ‘part of the job’ is clearly a consequence of twenty years of feminist activism against sexual harassment. When the Leeds TUCRIC survey (see above) was conducted in the 1980s, the concept of ‘sexual harassment’ had only recently migrated to the UK. Therefore, many women workers would have been unaccustomed to the idea that they could complain about unwanted male sexual conduct at work. However, by 1995 (when I conducted these interviews), most women workers have at least become aware of their right not to be sexually harassed at work. Penny left her job because ‘I wasn’t prepared to be treated like that’, and Ann explained that she had actually been able to demand the right not to be sexually harassed on one occasion: she asked to see a manager when her male co-worker was reading the *Sunday Sport* aloud in the customer helpline office. The male manager asked her, ‘Wouldn’t you like to move [to another desk]?’ Ann replied, ‘*No, I’m not the one that’s misbehaving*’ (italics added). This manager (who said that he was afraid of Ann’s co-worker) sought the assistance of a second male manager and together they persuaded the man to ‘be a bit more quiet’. Another interviewee, Lisa, informed the chef’s line manager that the women catering assistants whom the chef had dismissed because they did not like his sexual jokes could claim unfair dismissal. The chef was subsequently given a written warning. I do not wish to suggest that women are always able to resist workplace sexual harassment in similarly effective ways. Nevertheless, these two examples

do offer important evidence that successful resistance is not a doomed project. Equally importantly, interviewees' experiences demonstrate that not all men are now unaware or unconcerned that workplace sexual harassment is unacceptable. For example, when Ann was working as a clerical officer, she encountered two male co-workers who 'showed off with a lot of sexual talk and jokes, an awful lot about blow jobs'. Ann complained to the two men:

The older one said I had no sense of humour and said that the other girls [sic] didn't mind a bit. *The younger one went a bit pale and later he came over and apologised. He didn't want to lose his job, and he hadn't thought it was offensive* (italics added).

Another informant, Helen, explained that if women nurses were worried by the conduct of male patients, they could ask male staff to accompany them when they had to go into their rooms, 'and there is no suggestion that they are copping out if they do'. The workplace sexual harassment discourse is, then, achieving some successes in 'educating men'.

Of course, the current workplace sexual harassment discourse is not perfect. Though my seven informants unproblematically defined their experiences as 'sexual harassment' and Ann and Lisa had effected relatively successful resistance, many of my interviewees did encounter significant difficulties in finding effective resistance strategies against sexual harassment. I did not interview any women who had made a formal complaint of sexual harassment or attended an industrial tribunal (in contrast with bullied informants whose experiences are discussed in Chapter 6). This is underpinned by the absence or ineffectivity

of trade union representation in the women's accounts. Penny, Lisa and Joanna were employed in non-unionised workplaces. Penny felt that the absence of a trade union was a very significant obstacle to making a complaint about her managing director's conduct. However, though Clare was in a trade union, she explained that she was unable to approach her trade union representative for advice because he was one of the men who discussed his sex life in the office. Kathryn and Helen were trade union members but characterised their trade unions as 'toothless'. As a result, many of my interviewees had felt that the most sensible course of action was to leave their jobs. For example, when Penny's managing director decided that he wanted to have sex with her, she said that she realised that:

He's the director of a small company, you've got no comeback at all. ...You could go to the other director, but they're best mates. Who are they going to believe - a director or some clerk that you can get two a penny?

As such, Penny decided to walk out of her job - even though she did not have a new job to go to. Kathryn explained that she found it impossible to object when her financial manager began to proposition her because:

Being a Personal Assistant is basically a relationship job. ...it felt phenomenally disloyal to tell anyone he was doing it. ...traditionally, if you report things in this organisation, the man gets promoted and the woman never does *for the rest of her career*' (emphasis in original).

Kathryn managed to secure a transfer (without making a formal complaint of sexual harassment) but felt that a 'black mark' had gone on her employment record. One informant, Clare, had told her line manager about her male co-workers conduct, but she said that the complaint 'just made matters worse, because [co-workers] gave me the cold shoulder and made my life a misery'. Nevertheless, while these examples demonstrate curtailed resistance, women's coping strategies were in evidence in all the interviews I conducted. For example, Lisa explained that the women catering staff had supported each other when the chef made sexual jokes; Helen said that women nurses would talk about imaginary boyfriends to try to put a stop to sexual propositions by patients; and Ann said that, although her complaint (see above) had been effective, she subsequently consciously sought to avoid the male co-worker who read pornography at work because, 'I thought the effect he was having on me could lose me that job, and I'm not going to have that, I'm going to keep that job'. This suggests, as Wise and Stanley (1987:195) rightly observe, that:

If women weren't as powerful and such skilled manipulators as we are, women's lives would be much *worse*, for men's behaviours would be less checked, controlled and prescribed than they presently are. If women weren't so powerful, 'oppression' would be much more *oppressive* than it is (italics in original).

Though my informants in this section of the chapter were a relatively small sample of self-selecting workplace sexual harassment victims rather than women who reject the feminist

vocabulary of sexual harassment and I cannot therefore directly refute Thomas and Kitzyner's (1997:8) assessment that, 'many women...have never - despite all the policies, codes of conduct and legislative apparatus - accepted this feminist redefinition of women's experience [i.e. that unwanted sexual conduct is sexual harassment]', I do feel that it is appropriate to cautiously challenge such arguments. My data demonstrates that significant numbers of women have embraced the vocabulary of workplace sexual harassment. Indeed, the women with whom I spoke deployed the term 'sexual harassment' with confidence. This evidence is important because a clear recognition of the relevance of the sexual harassment discourse to many women's lives offers a way in which to strengthen this discourse against the anti-feminist backlash (exemplified by Roiphe, 1994) which wants women to redefine most 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life'.

**'[My line manager] didn't sexually harass me, as in harassed for sex. ...He was just horrible':
Women's interpretations of workplace sexism and working in a sexist or sexualised
environment**

Five of my women informants said that they could not interpret their experiences as sexual harassment, even though these experiences were often similar to those described above and did, therefore, appear to be consistent with the most widely understood definition of sexual harassment as 'unwanted sexual conduct' (Rubenstein, 1992). Two of these women mentioned sexism only very briefly: Jackie, a secretary who was bullied by her male line manager, felt that requests for cups of coffee were an example of sexism; and when Penny - whose experiences of sexual harassment in office work were discussed above - worked

as a barmaid, she conceptualised male customers' requests for dates as sexism rather than sexual harassment because, 'you know they're not going to be there the next night ...[so] it's not threatening whereas sexual harassment is'. Given the brevity of these two examples, in this section I have chosen to focus on the three accounts where women reflected in detail upon experiences which they did not conceptualise as 'sexual harassment'. Louise, a university research assistant registered for a PhD, interpreted her experiences as 'working in a sexist environment'. Joanna, a teacher, termed her experiences as 'working in a sexualised environment'. Elizabeth, an office junior, conceptualised her experiences as 'sexism'.

Collinson and Collinson (1996) analyse women insurance sales managers' experiences of conduct which could easily be described as sexual harassment (e.g. unwanted sexual propositions). Most of their interviewees were, however, reluctant to interpret their experiences as sexual harassment. Collinson and Collinson (1996:50) observe that the women's reluctance to recognise themselves as victims of sexual harassment appears to reflect identity concerns as both managers and women with maintaining an image of being in (hierarchical/sexual) control. The women did not want to define themselves as 'victims' (see also Mott and Condor, 1997:78). As Kelly (1988:146) explains in her study of women's experiences of sexual violence, 'either the influence of dominant meanings or the desire to not see themselves, or be seen by others, as someone who had been assaulted resulted in the events being minimised... Through comparing one's own experience with something "worse"...women feel less threatened and more able to go about their daily

lives'. My three women interviewees, though, were not necessarily expressing a generalised reluctance to deploy arguably 'serious' terms to describe experiences. Joanna, for instance, had interpreted experiences she had previously encountered while working as a sales assistant as 'sexual harassment' (see above). Joanna and Elizabeth defined the experiences analysed below as 'workplace bullying' as well as 'working in a sexualised environment'/'sexism'. Instead, the three interviewees had thought carefully about their experiences and wanted to define them in ways that they felt captured the dynamics of what had happened. Consequently, while commentators such as Herbert (1997) would perceive the women's unwillingness to perceive sexually harassing experiences as 'sexual harassment' to be an indication of women's ignorance of what counts as 'sexual harassment', I take the women's accounts as opportunities to critically reflect upon how women interpret unwanted male sexual conduct in the workplace. I will argue that a recognition of how women understand their experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct has important campaigning implications.

I begin by analysing Louise's experiences because she encountered problems which are extremely close to common-sense conceptualisations of workplace sexual harassment. I then discuss Joanna's situation because her experiences are slightly less consistent with common-sense conceptualisations of workplace sexual harassment. I conclude with an analysis of Elizabeth's experiences because she encountered problems which are the furthest away from common-sense conceptualisations of workplace sexual harassment. I stress, however, that my discussion is not meant to imply that all women with similar

experiences to my informants should interpret their experiences in the same ways as my informants: a central tenet of feminist analysis of sexual harassment is that women's interpretations of their own experiences matter.

As soon as Louise, my first informant, started her new job as a research assistant registered for a PhD in a university physics department, she discovered that, 'sexism was pretty much the culture of the department'. Most of the academic staff were men, whose 'main topic of conversation isn't their work or current events, but football'. As Louise had no interest in football, she had felt excluded. One male professor was particularly sexist: 'I've heard him stand in the corridor, and say very loudly, when he knows that doors are open, that there shouldn't be women in the department and if there are then they should be secretaries'. As I discuss below, sexism was so prevalent in this department that it had become common-place (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1994).

At the beginning of the academic year, a group of research/teaching assistants and postgraduates (eight men and two women) went out for a drink. One male postgraduate used the word 'cunt' in what Louise perceived to be a 'harsh and aggressive way'. The man's friend said to Louise, 'you don't like that word, do you?' and Louise agreed that she did not. The postgraduate 'launched into an attack on women, extreme feminists and fascists. He went on about women wanting to control men, thought police'. The second woman postgraduate student did not hear the incident, but later agreed with Louise that 'it was out of order'. The seven male students, however, 'laughed about it. They said,

“That’s what you expect when you come out for a drink with the boys!””. At a subsequent social gathering several months later, male postgraduates asked Louise: ‘When did you last have sex?’. When I interviewed her, Louise reflected retrospectively upon the meaning of such questions:

It wasn’t a joke. They really wanted to know. I get the impression you get that because they would like to have sex with you. They’re very intrigued by my sex life. Because I go out with men from other departments, there’s always a bit of jealousy: because you’re in their department you should be going out with them. ...There’s also the attitude that if [a woman] has a boyfriend, then it must mean that you’re not taking your work seriously enough. It’s OK for the men to have girlfriends, though. ...And if you do socialise with [men in the department], you have to be guarded: because they want to know what’s going on in your personal life they want you to get drunk [so that you will tell them personal details].

Louise felt that this interest in asking women students for the details of their sex lives was underpinned by the male research students’ growing realisation that they had joined a university department where sexism was acceptable:

When you’ve got professors saying women should only be secretaries, for instance, then [sexism] filters down. You get the feeling that the PhD students, before they arrive they might think twice about saying certain things, and then they arrive in the department and find that it’s great, you can talk about sport, go out and get pissed, you can say whatever

you want to in front of a woman and if [a woman] complains, then it's her fault. ...PhD students get socialised into the ethos of the department. They know they'll be here for 3 years so they take it on board.

Louise interpreted the men's conduct as a form of aggressive competition to see who could make the most outrageous remarks. She explained that aggressive competition was rife among the men in the male-dominated physics department. Graduate research seminars where PhD students give presentations on their work, for example, were not supportive events: Louise explained that, 'it's even been said that, "First somebody gives a talk, then we ask questions and then everybody launches into an attack on that person. This is how we do things"'. Louise found this very unpleasant and rarely attended the seminars. On one occasion when she did attend, she asked a question but, 'I came in for attack as well. It's almost like: "How dare she ask a question!"'.

Later in the year, Louise encountered the male postgraduate who had accused her of being an 'extreme feminist' in the student's union, 'I don't know if he was very drunk, but he was running his hand up and down my back'. This would appear to be a very definite instance of sexual harassment. Louise, however, did not interpret this experience in this way. She said that she had felt vaguely amused by the incident because the male postgraduate had always been extremely unpleasant towards her. Louise explained that:

I tend to see sexual harassment as something to do with making a move on somebody sexually. To do with sex, rather than sexism. Because [male postgraduates/teaching and research assistants] are my age, it's not really sexual harassment.

As the anti-feminist male postgraduate was Louise's peer rather than a more senior member of the academic staff and evidently disliked her so much that he would not be 'making a move' on her, Louise saw his actions as part of the sexist atmosphere of the physics department rather than as sexual harassment. Wise and Stanley (1987:4) are, therefore, correct to say that we have become accustomed to interpreting sexual harassment as harassment carried out by a man in a superior organisational position which involves sex in the sense of 'doing or having sex' or lust or desire. However, Louise's assertion that her experiences were not sexual harassment because they were not consistent with this conceptualisation suggests that women may reserve the interpretation 'sexual harassment' for experiences which do involve unreciprocated sexual attention perpetrated by a man in a superior organisational position.

The experiences encountered by my second informant show that even when women do encounter conduct which does conform to the conventional interpretation of workplace sexual harassment (i.e. conduct involving sex 'in the sense of "doing or having sex", or lust or desire' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:4)), they do not always interpret such experiences as sexual harassment. Joanna was appointed to a new job as a teacher in a special school. The school, she soon discovered, was 'saturated with sex. Everyone was being screwed by everybody else. Whoever the headmaster was having sex with the head of department was

having sex with'. Joanna explained that this caused problems because 'there were loads of people who had had relationships and had split up and were jealous of their ex's current partner'. The staffroom was awash with innuendo, instigated by male members of staff - particularly the headmaster. On one occasion the headmaster was sticking abstract paintings on a wall and observed, 'Look everybody, this is [a painting of] so-and-so's penis'. Joanna said that women staff 'were sort of going along with [the sexualisation], and some of them were feeling really uncomfortable about it'. One woman member of staff had been distressed when a male teacher had made jokes about 'large-breasted women', which she had felt were directed at her. Joanna herself felt that the situation was 'really unpleasant'.

These experiences could easily be interpreted as sexual harassment. The male staff did have 'lust or desire' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:4) for the women staff, which informed their engagement in the constant innuendo - i.e. 'unwanted sexual conduct' (Rubenstein, 1992) - which the women frequently did not enjoy. Joanna, however, said that she could not perceive her experiences in this school as sexual harassment. Although she said that the experiences 'felt like sexual harassment', she decided that 'it would be difficult to call it sexual harassment because it was more that there was a generalised sexualisation going on throughout the workplace'. The sexualisation was, then, so prevalent that it had become common-place (Thomas and Kitzinger, 1994) and Joanna's comment (above) that 'everyone was being screwed by everybody else' suggests that at least a certain percentage of the sexualisation must have been consensual rather than coercive. Joanna's

distinction between 'sexual harassment' and 'working in a sexualised environment' was also informed by her perception of whether or not the unwanted male sexual conduct was directed at one individual woman or directed at all women. Joanna said that she had not experienced sexual harassment at the school because, 'the headteacher wasn't actually harassing me *per se* because his behaviour was fairly similar to everybody'. This distinction was perhaps informed by Joanna's earlier experiences working as a sales assistant. When the shop manager made a joke simulating anal sex with her (see above) in front of male customers, Joanna had felt personally humiliated. She explained that this was because, 'he did it in such a dramatic, theatrical way so that everybody in the shop looked...it was because he grabbed hold of me...it felt really invasive'. In the school, however, all women were being humiliated and Joanna's experiences there had not involved unwanted physical contact. Thus, Joanna's assertion that her experiences were not sexual harassment suggests that women may reserve the interpretation 'sexual harassment' for unwanted male sexual conduct which involves physical contact and which they perceive as a personal humiliation.

The experiences of my third informant, Elizabeth, show that 'the further away a woman's experience was from the limited definition offered by the stereotype [in this case the stereotype is that sexual harassment involves being harassed for sex], the most likely it was that she would not define it as sexual violence' (Kelly, 1988:148). Elizabeth began a new job as a receptionist in a small travel agency. She soon discovered that the male travel agency owner was a 'chauvinist'. He would never make a drink for himself: he expected

women staff to bring him cups of tea. He would frequently look out of the window and exclaim:

Look, a man pushing a pushchair! Good God, what is the world coming to! Men don't push pushchairs! By all means stand by your wife while she pushes the pushchair. What is the world coming to? These men should be at work. Women should be doing this sort of thing.

On one occasion when he said this, Elizabeth and her two female co-workers asked, 'Would you like us to leave, then?' but he replied, 'That's completely different'. Elizabeth explained that she thought he wanted to employ female staff because he enjoyed having power over women. Elizabeth heard that once, for example, he had asked a woman to go and get a file. She replied that they were waiting for more files to be supplied from the stationers. He then said that he wanted a file now, so the woman sent another woman across to a nearby stationers to get a file. The travel agency owner then said, 'I asked you to get that file' and 'picked her up by the arm and frog-marched her across to the stationers and made her get the file and then frog-marched her back again, literally grabbing hold of her arm and escorting her every step of the way. He said, "When I tell you to do something, I expect you to do it"'.

The travel agency owner clearly preferred to deal with male customers, not their wives. When a male customer visited the agency, he would tell Elizabeth, 'speak nicely to Mr Smith and hopefully, if he gets a legover tonight he might come back in and book a

holiday tomorrow'. If a woman customer came in wearing clothes he considered not to be 'ladylike', the travel agency owner would say, 'I'm surprised you've got the money to go on holiday, coming in dressed in such a way'. There were, therefore, regular complaints from customers who felt that they had been treated discourteously. When women wearing pretty dresses came in and appeared to be 'submissive females', however, the travel agency owner was very pleasant towards them. Elizabeth felt that he was, 'obviously one of these blokes that had decided that he didn't want to face coming into his mid-life crisis. He liked to think he was a hit with women'. She told me that he often went into neighbouring shops to chat with the women workers. Elizabeth heard on the grapevine that he had asked one woman to dinner but she had said, 'Oh no, I wouldn't go out with you. You're old enough to be my father'. While Elizabeth was working at the travel agency, however, she said that the travel agency owner had never flirted with the women staff.

Another example of this man's sexism, which Elizabeth said that she 'did not think was very nice', were the jokes he made about female travel agents in front of his women staff. On one occasion, the travel agency owner failed to receive an invitation to the local travel agency association dinner. He decided that this was because a female travel agent had been elected as chairperson of the association and spent time on the telephone to his male friends saying that:

It's because that bloody stupid woman invites her women friends. It used to be a good laugh when I went in the old days: men sitting around having a joke, talking about women.

Of course, you can't do that these days because you have to be politically correct, which I don't believe in. Men are men and women are women. They know their place and we know our place.

Elizabeth explained that women staff in the travel agency were not allowed to wear trousers. In the summer, the travel agency owner told Elizabeth and her two female co-workers, 'Let's have those hems a little further up, shall we, ladies?'. The travel agency owner told Elizabeth, 'You are employed by me, to look pretty on the front desk, it's something attractive, and hopefully it'll make business pick up'. Elizabeth responded, 'Do you want me to take my clothes off and prance around nude?'. The travel agency owner's perception of Elizabeth as a sex object does appear to be an instance of workplace sexual harassment. However, Elizabeth explained, 'I didn't feel sexually harassed, but I thought it was quite unnecessary'. Elizabeth did not interpret any part of her experiences in the travel agency as sexual harassment:

Apparently, one young woman who used to work for him left because of sexual harassment. I don't know how strong it actually got. He didn't sexually harass me, as in harassed for sex. ...Most people think of sexual harassment as a boss or a member of the opposite sex pestering you for sex, but I wasn't pestered for sex. He was just horrible.

Elizabeth subsequently added that, 'I think it is a form of sexual harassment in the fact that it was a power game: a man getting power over a younger female', but she nevertheless concluded that, 'if it was sexual harassment then it was a very strange form of sexual

harassment'. This demonstrates that while Elizabeth did draw on feminist understandings of sexual harassment, she did not do so readily. In particular, she was not comfortable referring to sexist conduct as 'sexual harassment'. As such, it seems that her reluctance to interpret her experiences as sexual harassment is a consequence of the word 'sexual' in 'sexual harassment'. This suggests that women may reserve the interpretation 'sexual harassment' for conduct which they immediately perceive to be 'sexual'.

Rethinking the workplace sexual harassment discourse

The three accounts analysed in this second section of the chapter show that Wise and Stanley's (1987:94) assertion that 'sexual harassment can be described as "sexual" only in the sense that one sex, male does it to another sex, female' has not so far really affected the common-sense understanding of what counts as 'sexual harassment'. Wise and Stanley's intention was to broaden the meaning of an established term:

Including within the term 'sexual harassment' the entire spectrum of sexism, rather than just one extreme of it, has great advantages and provides great strengths. It enables us to analyse sexual harassment using the already developed framework provided by feminist thinking about 'sexism' and 'sexual politics' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:113).

As Kelly, Burton and Regan (1996:85) explain, feminists have often attempted to extend the meanings of words; to use them as 'collective nouns' covering a range of experiences. They report that the rationale for this approach is that it constitutes an explicit challenge

to definitions embodied in the law, and provides validation of violation through the powerful meanings which these words carry. Indeed, Wise and Stanley felt that this stance was justified because otherwise:

By picking out particular behaviours (those supposedly 'sexual') for inclusion within the definition of sexual harassment, and picking out particular kinds of men as 'the men who do' sexual harassment, the impression is given that sexual harassment is extraordinary, clearly sexual and always clearly objectionable, and so quite different from usual male behaviours and quite different from women's run-of-the-mill everyday experiences of men (Wise and Stanley, 1987:61).

The three accounts analysed above, however, suggest that women workers may remain reluctant to extend the meaning of 'sexual harassment' in the way advocated by Wise and Stanley. This should not be taken to imply, for example, that women do not understand what counts as sexual harassment (as Herbert, 1997, would suggest) or that they are frightened by the power of anti-feminism (as Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997, would argue) or that they have constructed a hierarchy of seriousness in which their own experience does not appear serious enough to merit interpretation as sexual harassment. These interviewees clearly did think the experiences described above were important. They would not have come forward to be interviewed for my research had they not thought so. Instead, the accounts demonstrate that women often want to make distinctions between 'sexual harassment', 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised environment' based on, for example, whether or not they perceive an incident to indicate unreciprocated sexual desire.

The prevalence of sexism and sexualisation in the university department, special school and travel agency also significantly informed the women's interpretation of their experiences as 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised environment' rather than 'sexual harassment'.

This suggests that new ways to describe unwanted male sexual conduct might need to be adopted so that women are able to name and challenge the practices which they find unacceptable. As Kelly, Burton and Regan (1996:86) report, creating new concepts with which to name the variation of experience, extending language itself, rather than widening the meaning of words is another feminist naming strategy - an alternative to the strategy exemplified above by Wise and Stanley's (1987) broad definition of what counts as sexual harassment. Wise and Stanley's definition of sexual harassment is, of course, an important campaigning tool against unwanted male sexual and non-sexual conduct. It is important to remember, however, that Wise and Stanley do not intend their definition of sexual harassment to be adopted uncritically. They explain that, 'we shouldn't take on trust anything, but critically examine it for ourselves; and of course we should do this with feminist naming as with any other' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:201). There is no reason why new definitions for social problems cannot be established. For example, Chapters 5-7 will show that many increasingly unacceptable features of the social relations of work have been reinterpreted as 'workplace bullying' in the UK in the 1990s.

At present, however, the outcome of Wise and Stanley's (1987:4) assertion that all 'male behaviour forced on women' is sexual harassment is that 'male behaviour forced on women' is only really firmly defined as unacceptable when it is defined as sexual harassment. As such, my three informants' decisions not to interpret their experiences as sexual harassment is problematical. As explained above, the supposed problem of women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment is now becoming a popular theme of sexual harassment analyses. Herbert (1997), for example, has discussed women's non-labelling of sexual harassment. She quotes a female sixth form student who received anonymous sexual fantasy letters. The woman says, 'I think he was a pervert but I don't think it was sexual harassment' (Herbert, 1997:26). Another woman reported that her male manager made comments about her recent marriage and said 'If...my husband couldn't keep up he would oblige', but says that, 'I don't consider what he did was right but I don't think it's sexual harassment' (Herbert, 1997:27). The content of these experiences does indeed make it surprising that the women did not interpret them as sexual harassment. Herbert's argument is that statements such as these demonstrate the 'ignorance of women and girls about what constitutes sexual harassment' (Herbert, 1997:26). I think, however, that Herbert's interviewees' observations that, 'He was a pervert' and 'I don't think what he did was right' are more important than the women's reluctance to call these experiences sexual harassment. This is because these comments clearly demonstrate that the women found these experiences unwelcome. Though Joanna, Elizabeth and Louise did not interpret their experiences as 'sexual harassment', it is evident that they too did not welcome these experiences: Joanna said the atmosphere in

the school was 'unpleasant'; Elizabeth felt that the travel agency owner's conduct was 'unnecessary'; and Louise felt 'excluded' in her university department. The women's willingness to define unwanted male sexual conduct as 'unacceptable' even though they did not interpret this conduct as 'sexual harassment' demonstrates another important achievement of the feminist discourse of workplace sexual harassment: women do not believe that unwanted male conduct is unproblematic.

I think that if Wise and Stanley (1987) had not been so concerned to use an already developed framework, they might have proposed 'gendered harassment' rather than 'sexual harassment' as a category to cover unwanted male sexual and non-sexual conduct. This may have been more successful as it would have removed the problem with the word 'sexual'. Epstein (1996) has recently advocated the term 'sexist harassment' because she says that 'the term "sexual harassment" obscures the experience of sexist harassment which is not overtly or obviously sexual in content or form' (Epstein, 1996:205). To illustrate her argument, Epstein recounts the experiences of Rebecca, a lesbian academic on a temporary contract. When Rebecca disagreed with William, a senior colleague, he would invade her space by touching her in a way which indicated that he did not take her seriously. Rebecca felt unable to make a formal complaint because she knew that in a disciplinary hearing she would have to agree that the workplace harassment she had encountered was not specifically 'sexual'. As Epstein observes, it is difficult to define harassment as 'sexual' when, in common-sense terms, it is not. An adoption of the interpretation 'sexist harassment' need not imply that 'sexist harassment' is completely

different from 'sexual harassment'. Instead, the concept offers a way in which women can interpret their experiences in the way they chose.

However, though 'sexist harassment' has an important consciousness-raising role in highlighting the similarities between sexual harassment and sexist harassment, it may be that the word 'harassment' will still remain problematic for many women. Elizabeth, Joanna and Louise, for example, did not use the word 'harassment' to describe their experiences. 'Harassment' is a very powerful way in which to draw attention to the unacceptability of particular experiences. As such, the women's reluctance to use this particular word is a cause for concern. Nevertheless, faithful naming is equally important, for as Kelly (1988:139) explains in another context, 'where names are not available, the extent and even existence of forms of sexual violence cannot be acknowledged'. Kelly found that she had to introduce two new interpretations of women's experiences of sexual violence to cover the range of women's experiences:

[The category] 'pressurised sex'... was introduced to take account of the fact that women do not simplistically define heterosexual sex as either consenting or rape, between these two is a range of pressure and coercion. Pressurised sex covers experiences in which women decided not to say no to sex but where they felt pressured to consent. (Kelly, 1988:82) ... [The category] 'coercive sex' covers experiences which women referred to as being like rape. Specific pressure was always used by the man, often involving the threat of, or actual, physical force (Kelly, 1988:84).

Kelly's introduction of these two new categories does not undermine the established category 'rape'. Instead, the introduction of these categories recognised that over time women's definitions of their experiences may change. This is also true of women's definitions of sexual harassment. Thomas and Kitzinger (1994:155), for example, interviewed a woman who said that she had not interpreted wolf-whistling as sexual harassment in the past, but said, 'when you think about it, it is [sexual harassment]'. I argue, therefore, that feminists should embrace 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment' as well as 'sexual harassment' and 'sexist harassment' as interpretations for unwanted male sexual conduct at work. This is important because if women's terms for unwanted male sexual conduct are not incorporated into feminist discourse, women will not be able to clearly state the unacceptability of the experiences they have encountered. This may result in women abandoning the discourse of unwanted male sexual conduct in favour of, for example, the workplace bullying discourse (see Chapter 5).

Indeed, Elizabeth and Joanna both stated unproblematically that they had encountered workplace bullying. While Joanna's experience involved a single incident in which she was locked in a cupboard by a female teacher, Elizabeth interpreted all her experiences in the travel agency as 'sexism'/'workplace bullying'. In particular, she said that the travel agency owner had bullied her when he shouted at her for arriving at work at one minute past nine o'clock on one occasion, made her type out a letter six times even though there was nothing wrong with it, and accused her of wasting money when photocopying, 'It's

eight pence a sheet!'. When she objected on these occasions, she was told, 'You are a very impertinent young lady!'. Elizabeth's readiness to interpret these experiences as workplace bullying contrasts sharply with her reluctance to conceptualise the travel agency owner's conduct as sexual harassment. As such, Elizabeth's account demonstrates the danger mentioned above that women may interpret experiences which involve unwanted male sexual conduct as workplace bullying because they do not perceive these experiences to be sexual harassment and do not possess any widely accepted alternative terminology with which to name such experiences. This is problematic because the majority of the experiences Elizabeth described must be understood as unwanted male sexual/sexist conduct in order to highlight the unacceptability of unwanted male sexual/sexist conduct.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed definitions women use in discussing men's unwanted sexual conduct at work. My interviews with seven women who have encountered experiences they interpreted as sexual harassment suggest that Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997:8) assertion that, 'most women refuse to define their experiences as sexual harassment' can be cautiously challenged, even though I cannot directly refute their argument. For my qualitative data demonstrates that significant numbers of women have embraced the vocabulary of sexual harassment: most of the women with whom I spoke expressed no hesitation in interpreting some experiences as sexual harassment. While I do not, of course, wish to underestimate the problem of the anti-feminist backlash (e.g. the burning

of sexual harassment policies in North American universities described by Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997:8), I do wish to stress that rather than being a concept in crisis, 'sexual harassment' remains a 'success story for late twentieth century feminism' (Brant and Too, 1994:1). A clear recognition of the relevance of the sexual harassment discourse to many women's lives offers a way in which to strengthen this discourse against the anti-feminist backlash (exemplified by Roiphe, 1994) which wants women to redefine most 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life'.

I have, however, expressed concern that most feminists have constructed 'sexual harassment' as the only meaningful conceptualisation for unwanted male sexual conduct (e.g. Wise and Stanley, 1987; Monson, 1997; Herbert, 1997; Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997) and as such women's alternative interpretations for men's unwanted workplace sexual conduct are not currently respected (except by Epstein, 1996). Of course, I agree that it is important to talk to women 'about male oppression, patriarchy and masculine myths of sexual prowess, uncontrollable sexual urges and other such tales. ...to provide them with a political understanding of their gendered situation, to help them understand how power has been appropriated by men and masculine institutions...' (Herbert, 1997:28), but there is no reason why this must mean advocating only one interpretation for unwanted male sexual conduct.

In this chapter, I have argued that women's understandings of their own experiences must matter. When women do not interpret their experiences as sexual harassment, but instead

refer to incidents which could be defined as sexual harassment as 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised environment', this need not always be perceived as an indication that the women perceive these experiences as unproblematically 'just part of everyday life'. Instead, the women I interviewed did recognise sexual harassment, but sought to make distinctions between sexual harassment and sexism on the grounds of, for example, whether or not they perceived a given incident as an indication of unreciprocated male sexual interest.

The most important aspect of the experiences analysed in the second section of the chapter, however, is that although the women did not interpret these experiences as sexual harassment, they were not saying that they welcomed these experiences. My argument, then, is that the workplace sexual harassment discourse must incorporate new terms, e.g. 'sexism'. This does not necessarily mean that feminists should cease to strive for a very wide definition of sexual harassment. Instead, I think that the existence of a range of terms for unwanted male sexual conduct rather than just one term will enable more women to recognise and perhaps challenge unwelcome experiences. Otherwise, if feminists continue to encourage women to interpret all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment and women do not want to do so, there is a danger that women will feel forced to define any experience which they do not interpret as 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life', in the way advocated by anti-feminist backlash spokespersons.

Chapter Four

Men's Experiences of Workplace Sexual Harassment

Introduction

What are the dynamics of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment? In this chapter, to consider this research question, I analyse two heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by heterosexual men or women.

I stress that while this chapter will demonstrate that heterosexual men encounter workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by men or women in the form of sexual allegations, it does not seek to challenge the statistical prevalence or political importance of the male perpetrator/female victim model of workplace sexual harassment. Of the 50 interviews which I conducted for this research, only two men recounted experiences which could readily be construed as workplace sexual harassment. This is clearly consistent with the argument that women are the typical targets of workplace sexual harassment. My two interviews cannot and are not intended to establish the statistical prevalence of sexually harassed men. Instead, my concern is the qualitative dynamics of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. The qualitative claims of my analysis can, however, be situated in a larger picture: a survey of 400 staff by the Institute of Personnel and Development found that 7 per cent of men and women were aware of men being sexually harassed by women in their workplace (*City Centre Newsletter*, 1995). The workplace sexual harassment of men is not, therefore, confined to my two informants.

Wise and Stanley (1987) imply that a recognition of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment is inappropriate because (i) 'a woman caressing a man's buttock *means* something very different from the same behaviour done by a man to a woman' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:65 italics in original) and (ii) 'behaviour becomes sexism (and sexual harassment) by virtue of being lodged within, indeed providing a constituting element of, a society-wide *system* of relations between the sexes' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:66 italics in original). My focus on men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment does not, however, mean that I wish to prove that the workplace sexual harassment of men has exactly the same meaning as the workplace sexual harassment of women and that, therefore, 'patriarchy' is equally oppressive for men and women. Nevertheless, as Connell (1987:183) explains, hegemony masculinity - i.e. a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes (Connell, 1987:184) - is constructed in relation to subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. Instead, my argument, as outlined in Chapter 1, is that particularly in the context of the anti-feminist backlash (see Thomas and Kitzinger, 1997), feminists must do more than re-iterate what types of experiences women can interpret as workplace sexual harassment (e.g. Herbert, 1997). Feminists must also begin to think creatively about how the analysis of 'workplace sexual harassment' can be strengthened. One way in which I think that this may be done is by problematising dominant feminist thinking which either says that a) heterosexual men can never be sexually harassed by heterosexual women/men (e.g. Herbert, 1992) or which b) gives only

cursory mention of the workplace sexual harassment of men (e.g. Stanko, 1988:94; Thomas, 1997:131).

The two examples of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment which I consider in some detail in this chapter differ in key respects: one involves the harassing actions of other men while in the other a woman was the initiator of the harassment. In examining these two cases, I will be exploring the common and distinctive features of the experiences of two heterosexual men who experienced workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by differently gendered protagonists. One of the men, Robert, is a white, married 30 year old factory section leader who has three young daughters. He told me about his experiences of harassment perpetrated by several men at his factory. The other man, Alex, was a white, single, childless 32 year old working in an animal sanctuary. He was not himself my informant, because he had committed suicide after being harassed by his ex-girlfriend/co-worker. Alex's experiences were recounted to me by his friend Mary, who was a volunteer at the animal sanctuary while Alex was being harassed. Mary came forward to be interviewed because she felt very strongly that the animal sanctuary had failed in its 'duty of care' towards Alex. In my analysis in this chapter, I begin by discussing Alex's experiences because workplace sexual harassment is widely understood as a cross-sex experience.

My analysis is necessarily exploratory because: (a) I have only two cases to interrogate; and (b) men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment have not previously been

scrutinised. It should be noted that, while both Alex's and Robert's experiences can be properly conceptualised as examples of workplace sexual harassment, this terminology is not necessarily an automatic choice. Robert interpreted his experiences as 'workplace bullying' as well as 'sexual harassment'. Many of Alex's co-workers had defined his situation as a 'personal problem' rather than harassment, but in retrospect Mary regarded it as 'sexual harassment'. Against the background of such contested labels, I have chosen to analyse these experiences as 'workplace sexual harassment' in order to highlight the sexual and gendered nature of the conduct the men encountered. These aspects of the men's experiences would be much less visible if conceptualised as 'workplace bullying', given the currently dominant perception of workplace bullying as non-sexual conduct unrelated to aspects of the victim's personal identity (see Chapters 1 and 5).

'[His co-worker/ex-girlfriend] said: "You're no good in bed. Thank God I've found somebody that's better than you"': Workplace sexual harassment of a man by a woman

Alex was working as a paid employee in a non-unionised animal sanctuary where animals were often cruelly treated by the managers. He was badly paid but felt passionately about the animals he cared for. He became involved with a Jane, an unpaid volunteer at the sanctuary. They bought a house together. Then she left him and went to live with another man. She found a paid job elsewhere and no longer worked at the animal sanctuary. Subsequently, the house was repossessed because Alex was unable to pay the mortgage from his own poor salary. He had to move to a YMCA hostel. He had a dog which he could not take there with him. Then, Jane started appearing at the animal sanctuary to

work as an unpaid volunteer. As her current paid job elsewhere was coming to an end, she was looking for a new job. Mary presumed that she wanted to work in a paid capacity at the animal sanctuary. Jane began harassing Alex in front of the staff and members of the public, by referring to what she perceived as his poor sexual performance in comparison with her current boyfriend. Alex's line managers did nothing to curtail this situation. They defined it as a personal matter between Alex and Jane. Jane then began a relationship with Alex's friend at the animal sanctuary. The friend told Alex what was going on. He then chose to end his relationship with Jane because he had decided that his friendship with Alex was more important, but he did not have a chance to tell Alex this because that night Alex hanged himself with a dog's lead in the YMCA hostel. The animal sanctuary hushed up the suicide and claimed that it was nothing to do with them. The managers said that Alex had committed suicide because he was a drug addict. A representative of the organisation informed Mary that if she appeared at the inquest or wrote letters saying that the sanctuary's duty of care had been negligent, they would make it difficult for her to work with animals again. Drugs were not mentioned in the inquest verdict (which was that Alex had taken his own life whilst depressed), but neither was the animal sanctuary shown to have any responsibility for what had happened.

The dynamics of hegemonic masculinity in men's experiences of cross-sex workplace sexual harassment: The feminisation of men I

'She was after anyone in trousers': The implications of the 'slag' discourse in Alex's experiences

Wise and Stanley (1987) report that when the concept 'sexual harassment' emerged in the UK, the press sought to construct sexual harassment as a gender-neutral experience by identifying the 'office Romeo' - the over-sexed man engaging in normal male responses to a sexual situation - and then unearthing the 'office Juliet' - a mature woman, experienced in sexual goings-on and with an eye for shy, nervous and sexually inexperienced males. Many feminists are, however, unconvinced by such suggestions that women can sexually harass men. Cockburn (1991:152), for example, says that when men claim that women as often as men are sexual harassers at work, this has to be read as bad faith because women very rarely possess the combination of sexual inclination and power that would turn them into harassers of the damaging kind that men are.

However, while feminists usually conceptualise workplace sexual harassment as male-perpetrated and female-experienced, workplace sexual harassment has been defined as 'unwanted sexual conduct, or conduct based on sex, which is offensive to the recipient' (Rubenstein, 1992) and as such, men as well as women can take legal action against workplace sexual harassment. As yet, however, only one man has made use of the Sex Discrimination Act (1976) in the UK to complain of workplace sexual harassment (Collier, 1995:46). As Alex was a man who encountered woman-perpetrated unwanted and offensive sexual insults which undermined him as a man, his experiences seem consistent with a conceptualisation of workplace sexual harassment as cross-sex 'unwanted sexual conduct or conduct based on sex, which is offensive to the recipient' (Rubenstein, 1992) which can happen to men as well as to women. Therefore, Alex could plausibly have

claimed to have experienced workplace sexual harassment. Indeed, in the US, there have been several highly publicised legal cases in which men have successfully claimed to have been sexually harassed by women. For example, a male Peace Corps worker was awarded \$250,000 after his female boss tried to force him into having an affair with her, despite his continued reminders to her that he was married (*Guardian*, 2/8/96).

This legal case, however, demonstrates that workplace sexual harassment is conceptualised as unreciprocated (hetero)sexual attention. (Furthermore, it is significant that the man drew attention to his marital status to prove that he did not welcome his woman line manager's advances. It is plausible to suggest that if this man had been unpartnered, for example, he would have had much more difficulty claiming that he was not tempted by the woman's attentions. The 'male sex drive discourse' (Hollway, 1984) wrongly casts all men as sexually voracious.) Alex, in contrast, did not encounter experiences which can be readily interpreted as unreciprocated sexual attention. The workplace sexual harassment he suffered took place following the end of a sexual relationship. Alex's ex-girlfriend was not, therefore, expressing sexual attraction for him. Instead, Jane's sexual insults indicate sexual contempt. Such a scenario is not currently easily perceived as an example of workplace sexual harassment of men. Wise and Stanley (1987:94), for example, say that they perceive sexual harassment as 'sexual' only in the sense that one sex (male) does it to another sex (female). Yet when they 'recognise that women can and do, sometimes, perhaps, intrude on men using sexual means' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:65), they revert to a very conventional view of sexual harassment to explain

how women might intrude on men in this way: 'we're not arguing that women never leer at men or make obscene suggestions or stare at men's genitals or touch them up' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:65). While Wise and Stanley do say that these experiences overlap with sexual harassment, they claim that they are not synonymous with sexual harassment. This is because Wise and Stanley believe that women cannot 'do sexism' to men (Wise and Stanley, 1987:66). The currency of this point of view is one reason why Alex's workplace experiences were not perceived as particularly problematical by his line manager and many of his co-workers.

Alex's line manager and many of his co-workers defined Jane's sexual allegations against Alex as a 'personal problem' rather than 'workplace harassment'. As Mary observed, 'Jane would storm in and start on him and everyone would leave. Almost as if it was a personal thing between them'. The end of Alex and Jane's relationship was clearly 'a personal thing'. However, when Jane heckled Alex at the animal sanctuary, Alex and Jane's problems became 'public'. An unpaid volunteer worker was disrupting the work of a paid employee. At this point, Alex's line manager might have intervened in order to prevent the repetition of Jane's allegations in the workplace. Mary felt that, 'They should have got her off-site the moment it started so that he was left to work in peace, because he was there to work and couldn't just walk out'. This did not take place. Instead, Jane's sexual reputation significantly affected how Alex's co-workers and line managers responded to her continual harassment of Alex. Mary explained:

For a long time Alex was being harassed by Jane, who wasn't a paid employee of the organisation. It was obvious to a lot of the people there, because they knew what Jane was like, and they just left it. ...Jane was often after all the men, even members of the public. At one time she was there with see-through clothes on, and there were some comments made by members of the public. ...She was after anybody in trousers really.

Mary's comments demonstrate that the majority of Jane's co-workers (even Mary herself, though she stressed that she liked her apart from her behaviour towards Alex) viewed Jane in a rather unproblematised fashion as a 'slag' (discussed by Lees, 1993, in her analysis of adolescent girls and sexuality). This was because Jane's conduct was seen to mimic a male 'sex drive discourse' rather than a more gender 'appropriate' female 'have/hold discourse' (discussed by Hollway, 1984 in her analysis of gender difference and the production of subjectivity) and she had demonstrated her potential sexual availability - though notably on only one occasion - by wearing very revealing clothes. Therefore, Alex was denied the right of finding her behaviour distressing. It seems to have been assumed that he should have known better than to have become involved with a woman who so clearly did not conform to 'appropriate' femininity and since he had become involved with her that he should have conformed to 'appropriate' masculinity and not have taken the relationship very seriously, paralleling informants interviewed by Willis (1977) who drew attention to young men's distinction between women they would have sex with and women they would marry.

Indeed, Jane did not want a long-term relationship with Alex. She did not wish to conform to gender 'appropriate' conduct, salvaging her sexual reputation by acquiring a steady boyfriend (Lees, 1993:53). Instead, Jane's conduct indicates that she was concerned to resist 'appropriate' femininity. Alex, however, could not conform to gender 'appropriate' behaviour, enhancing his reputation with boasts of conquests, domination and performance (Lees, 1993:30-31). He wanted a long-term relationship with Jane. He did not share his co-workers' perceptions of Jane. On several occasions, Mary told Alex, 'You realise she's a slut?' and he replied, 'No, I think she's alright'. Mary explained that even when men were ringing Jane at the house she shared with Alex and even when she began spending more and more days not living with him, 'he was still denying in his own mind that she was forming another relationship'. Alex was distressed when Jane moved out and even more distressed when she started insulting him at his workplace. Mary explained, 'He'd get very upset. I'd find him sitting under a hedge crying. Lots of people tried to help Alex. There were a few people that actually took him home'. As this situation, therefore, demonstrates a reversal of stereotypical gender relations in which women are believed to subscribe to a 'have/hold' discourse and men are believed to subscribe to a 'male sex-drive' discourse (Hollway, 1984), it began to construct Alex as less than the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.

Over time, Jane's conduct towards Alex became so routine that it was defined as a 'harmless' feature of Jane and Alex's everyday workplace interaction. This is evident in Mary's comment that when a worker said that she thought action should be taken, another

co-worker replied, 'Oh they're always at it. Leave them alone'. This lack of concern hinged on Jane's sexual reputation but was also significantly informed by Alex's biological sex, age and physical appearance. Mary explained, 'I think because Alex was in his 30s, and he was a big chap, I think when you look at someone who is that big, you think they're strong and they're not'. As it became apparent, however, that Alex was unable to deal with Jane's continual sexual allegations - that 'a big chap in his 30s' was not able to cope with workplace harassment perpetrated by 'a woman who wore see-through clothes' - this meant that his 'masculine' reputation was being irretrievably damaged. A 'real man' would have been able to deal with Jane's sexual allegations. Alex's inability to do so firmly established him as less than the ideal of masculinity.

The interpretation of Alex as less than the ideal of masculinity was probably reinforced by his employment in a caring (i.e. 'feminised') occupation. For as Williams (1993:3) points out in her introduction to a collection exploring men's experiences of doing 'women's work', such men are immediately suspected of not being 'real men' (for instance, they are perceived to be gay, effeminate or lazy). Pringle (1993:138-139) offers an example drawn from her research on secretaries. She reports that the male and female co-workers of male secretaries assumed that they had chosen to be secretaries because they had 'some "problem" with their masculinity'. The social construction of hegemonic masculinity implies, for example, that men should not be caring and emotional. Alex's masculinity did not, however, conform to this conceptualisation. Mary explained that he had been a very

caring and emotional man. When animals had only been given a few days to live, Alex would work on these animals and try to bring them round.

Such an approach had jarred with line management's appalling cruelty to animals, as described by Mary. She told me that dogs were continually kept in their kennels and not allowed out for a run and cats were being killed even though there was space in which to house them at the sanctuary. Mary herself had been dismissed after she had contacted another animal sanctuary to find a cat to look after kittens which would have died if they had been left alone overnight. After Alex began to encounter workplace sexual harassment from Jane - and, therefore, became constructed as less than the ideal of masculinity - Alex's female line manager began killing the animals which Alex was looking after, i.e. she victimised Alex in a way which was informed by the gender 'inappropriateness' of a man being caring and emotional in the workplace and in his personal relationships.

'[Male co-workers] were saying "Do I go down on my own daughters? Do I make them bleed?"... If anybody had been raped or sexually assaulted in the local area they would say I'd done it': Workplace sexual harassment of a man by men

Robert was working in a non-unionised factory, doing a job he enjoyed. He was promoted to the job of section leader. After achieving this promotion three male co-workers and a manager began sexually harassing him. They accused him of incest and of committing the rapes and sexual assaults they read about in the local newspaper. The harassment involved direct questions about these incidents which were sometimes shouted across the factory;

whispering so that Robert could not hear what they were saying about him; and days when nothing happened. In addition to the allegations of incest and rape, Robert also had his shoelaces repeatedly cut while he was working at his bench. Robert's wife - who worked in another part of the factory - found out about this and cut the perpetrator's shoelaces. This halted this particular form of harassment, but the allegations of rape and incest continued. Robert reported what was going on to his line manager, who advised him not to hit the four harassers or else he would be dismissed. Robert had no faith in the staff association being able to help him. The staff association had no experience of dealing with grievances. It mainly concerned itself with organising social events. Finally, Robert went off sick for a week. During this time he contemplated committing suicide. His line manager asked him to go back and assured him that the problem would be dealt with. He also said that going off sick because of these allegations was like not reporting for work after having had a funny haircut. The abuse then stopped for six months. However, at the end of these six months Robert had just returned from a week's holiday and found that there was a problem with his wages. The manager who had previously been sexually harassing him called him into his office and accused him of not being a good worker. Robert then realised that the harassment was going to start again. In response to this, he went sick a day later and never returned to his job. He applied for a new job in another factory, claiming on the application form that he had not been off sick in the last year. At the interview he admitted that he had given this inaccurate information on his application form, but when he explained the situation he was given the job anyway.

The dynamics of hegemonic masculinity in men's experiences of same-sex workplace sexual harassment: The feminisation of men workers II

'It's like if I had somebody come in here who said they were off sick last week because they had had a funny haircut': The implications of the 'male bonding' discourse in Robert's experiences

Workplace sexual harassment is frequently assumed to be a cross-sex problem. However, Epstein (1996), in an analysis of hetero/sexist harassment and the enforcement of heterosexuality, shows that gay men often harass other men who are presumed to be gay and/or effeminate in order to defend their own masculinity. One gay male interviewee, for example, explained how he befriended a number of gay and/or effeminate boys but behaved homophobically to gay and/or effeminate boys who were not his friends. In this way, he was able to present himself as masculine and feel masculine (Epstein, 1996:213). Epstein's analysis, therefore, offers an original and significant contribution to the sexual harassment debate. It demonstrates a recognition that workplace sexual harassment does not always involve a heterosexual man sexually harassing a heterosexual woman for sex. Nevertheless, the workplace sexual harassment of heterosexual men by heterosexual men still remains largely invisible. As Robert observed:

If I'd been a woman I would have had grounds for claiming sexual harassment. If I had been black I would have been able to claim racial harassment. But the thing is that I am white and a man, so there was nothing I could do about it.

The invisibility of same-sex workplace sexual harassment is one consequence of the conflation between 'sexual harassment' and 'sex'. For, as explained above, workplace sexual harassment is assumed to entail unreciprocated sexual attention. Therefore, when men do sexually harass men, the perpetrator(s) and/or victims(s) are thought to be gay. UK press reporting of a US legal case in which a man successfully claimed to have been sexually harassed by a man illustrates this point. Frank Christian, a mechanic, was awarded \$4.2 million after the courts agreed that his line manager's lewd remarks and suggestive slaps constituted workplace sexual harassment, but 'what is strikingly bizarre about Frank Christian's situation is that he is heterosexual as is his boss' (*Guardian*, 16/7/97).

This legal case also demonstrates that the workplace sexual harassment of heterosexual men by heterosexual men can parallel the workplace sexual harassment of women by men: e.g. 'lewd remarks and suggestive slaps'. This seems to imply that 'horseplay' between heterosexual men, i.e. 'intense physical contact...grabbing men's genitals from behind, poking fingers up bottoms, rubbing chests, attacking with brooms or T-squares, or simply hearty behaviour with hugging and firm hand contact' (Hearn, 1985:124), is now being redefined as 'sexual harassment'. This is a significant development. Stanko (1990), in a study of women's and men's efforts to manage physical and sexual danger in everyday life, reports that 'initiation ceremonies' (a form of 'horseplay' directed at new recruits) can be dangerous and distressing for men. One of Stanko's interviewees, a 16 year old man learning the car repair trade, told her that his co-workers 'ripped open my overalls and sprayed my balls with paint' (Stanko, 1990:121). The man's family sent in a letter of

complaint, but the company director responded, 'your letter brought a smile to my face having experienced a similar situation to that of your son when I was an apprentice ... I am sorry you do not see the funny side of events' (Stanko, 1990:121). Stanko observes that such incidents are not seen as posing sexual danger, but as 'unofficial training given by fellow workmates' (Stanko, 1990:121). The legal case cited above suggests that this conceptualisation of 'horseplay' and 'initiation ceremonies' is finally being problematised. Robert, however, encountered verbal sexual allegations rather than 'intense physical contact' (Hearn, 1985:124). As such, then, his experiences are not easily interpreted as 'horseplay'/'sexual harassment'. This is one reason why Robert's workplace experiences were not perceived as particularly problematical by his line manager and many of his co-workers.

Robert explained that when he returned to work after going AWOL as a result of the workplace sexual harassment he had encountered, his line manager said, 'It's like if I had somebody come in here who said they were off sick last week because they had had a funny haircut', i.e. that Robert had gone AWOL in order to avoid being teased about a trivial matter. In this way, Robert's line manager sought to define the workplace sexual harassment of a heterosexual man by heterosexual men as simply a 'pisstake' (Collinson, 1988 & 1992). Workplace humour is indeed very characteristic of factory environments. For example, apprentices are often sent to ask for a 'long stand' (Collinson, 1992:112). As Collinson (1992:123) explains in his analysis of managing the shopfloor, workplace humour is one medium through which collective solidarity to resist boredom, the

organisational status system and management control emerges. While Collinson (1992:123) explains that shopfloor joking is found to embody considerable social pressure to conform to its central values that reflect working class masculinity (manual workers were required to display a willingness, for example, to give and take a joke, to swear, to be dismissive of women, white collar workers and managers and to retain their domestic authority), the sheer prevalence of workplace humour between male factory workers and its non-harassing meaning for many participants significantly affected the line manager's response to Robert's complaints of workplace sexual harassment/bullying.

At our interview, Robert was concerned to explain that he had not interpreted the sexual allegations made against him as a joke/pisstake. He had observed that the four men were not laughing when they made the allegations and, as Lyman (1987:153) points out in his analysis of the fraternal bond as a joking relationship, a cue must be given in order to establish a frame for a joke. When a cue is properly given and accepted, Lyman explains, the everyday rules of social order are suspended and the rule 'this is fun' is imposed on the expression of hostility (Lyman, 1987:153). In Robert's case, the absence of laughing made him feel that the sexual allegations were not intended as a joke. Nevertheless, Lyman also says that 'nearly all jokes have an aggressive content, indeed shared aggression towards an outsider is one of the primary ways by which a group may overcome internal tension and assert its solidarity' (Lyman, 1987:150). One man interviewed by Lyman (1987:155) explained that, 'most of the interaction we have is verbally abusing each other, making disgusting references to your mother's sexuality, or the women you were seen with, or

your sex organ, the size of your sex organ'. Therefore, while verbal abuse may appear an unlikely topic for a joking relationship, Lyman's research demonstrates that this is indeed a common interaction among men. This suggests, perhaps paralleling the 'dripping tap' of women's experiences of sexual harassment (Wise and Stanley, 1987:114), that aggressive joking might be such a routine feature of male-male interaction that men simply take this conduct for granted even though there is evidence (e.g. Collinson, 1992:110) that not all men enjoy such joking.

Indeed, men are expected to react to aggressive joking in particular ways, as a male engineer interviewed by Collinson (1988:188) explains: 'It's a form of survival, you insult first before they get one back. The more you get embarrassed, the more they do it, so you have to fight back'. Male miners interviewed by Yount (1991:400) in her ethnography of a coal mine, explained that the 'witty and cutting comeback', 'the ability to synchronise with the rhythms of the banter' was a way in which miners sought to 'fit in'. In contrast with many of the male engineers/miners in Collinson's and Yount's studies, Robert did not want to join in and make sexual allegations against his four harassers. While Collinson (1992:118) reports that 'snapping' (a successful breaking down of another's defences) and 'losing your rag' is almost as commonplace as 'having a joke' in shopfloor relations, Robert never 'lost his rag'. He hoped that the men would stop making sexual allegations against him. Robert, therefore, failed to conform to what was perceived as 'appropriate' masculine behaviour in his work context because he neither 'had a joke' nor 'lost his rag'. When his line manager observed that, 'It's like if I had somebody come in here who said

they were off sick last week because they had had a funny haircut', this implies that a man should be able to stand up for himself and laugh off the sexual allegations made against him. This parallels male interviewees in Stanko and Hobdell's (1993) study of the coping strategies of men who had experienced a physical assault, who felt that men ought to be strong enough to face male aggression. These men used terms such as 'the John Wayne syndrome', 'macho-man', 'cave man', 'defender' and 'natural man' to articulate the existence of an ideal image of manhood (Stanko and Hobdell, 1993:404). Robert's inability to conform to these sorts of stereotypes constructed him as less than the ideal of masculinity.

The interpretation of Robert as less than the ideal of masculinity was probably inflected by his problematical occupational status. As a section leader, Robert had little in common with either the three shopfloor workers or the manager who sexually harassed him. Robert felt that the three sexual harassers who were his co-workers might have been jealous when he was promoted to the job of section leader because 'obviously they found out that I was getting section leader's money'. He suggested that this jealousy might have been fuelled because he lives in a four bedroomed house: 'Maybe they think that someone on the shopfloor shouldn't live in a four bedroomed house'. While Collinson (1992:115) reports that men who sought promotion or who had achieved upward mobility tended to use humour to emphasise their cultural loyalty to the group by positioning themselves as the object of the group's piss-taking, Robert did not engage in this form of 'impression management' (Collinson, 1992:116). As such, he may have lost the respect of his former

co-workers and, therefore, been set up for 'malicious piss-takes' (Collinson, 1992:118). However, Collinson (1992:119-122) explains that workers' deployment of 'malicious piss-takes' is often a form of social control over other workers who are perceived to be lazy (see also Yount, 1991:401). There was certainly no evidence in our interview that Robert had been targeted for 'malicious piss-takes' as a result of laziness. Indeed, Robert said that he enjoyed his work and furthermore he had just been promoted. The experiences Robert encountered are not, therefore, an example of the most common reason for malicious verbal abuse on the shopfloor. Instead, Robert's experiences demonstrate a difference between 'razzing' (playful, humorous teasing that was kept at a level considered tolerable to the recipient) and 'harassment' (which is intended to exceed the target's threshold of manageable distress and to designate the person as an outsider) (as categorised by Yount, 1991:400).

The type of allegations levelled against Robert significantly informed the construction of Robert as less than the ideal of masculinity. At first glance, though, allegations of rape and incest seem to construct Robert as an ideal of masculinity in the terms set by hegemonic masculinity. Collinson (1992), for example, reports that in the all-male environment of the Component Division, masculine sexual prowess was a pervasive topic:

Mediated through bravado and joking relations, a stereotypical image of self, which is assertive, independent, powerful and sexually insatiable is constructed, protected and embellished. By contrast, women are dismissed as passive, dependent and only interested

in catching a man. ...Younger men tended to display a fetishization of sexuality and a reduction of women to sexual objects' (Collinson, 1992:114).

One man in the factory Collinson studied sought to embellish his infamous reputation as a 'superstud' by maintaining a 'sex diary' in which he graded the sexual performance of his female 'victims'. Smart (1989:29) observes, in her analysis of rape, that in the social construction of male and female sexuality, female sexuality is pathologised. Women are seen as too reserved and guilty to enjoy sex and satisfy men: wives do not 'come across' enough. Smart comments that what is implicit in this is that women are assumed to possess something that they are not prepared to share. She says that it would follow that if all women are seen as having the thing that men most need, and if they are also seen as grudging with it, or as so out of touch with their 'real' sexual feelings that they deny it to themselves and to men, then the problem for men is how to gain control of women's sexuality in spite of women themselves (Smart, 1989:30). As such, being a sexual predator and sexualising all women is regarded as normal, even desirable for men. Pressing a woman until she submits is a natural, pleasurable phallogentric pastime (Smart, 1989:42). Therefore, when a man is alleged to have raped women, he is actually being defined as a man who has engaged in 'manly' conduct.

This interpretation of sexual violence against women as an indicator of 'manly' conduct is also present in allegations of incest. Bell (1993:57), in an exploration of feminist analyses of incest, reports that feminists have suggested that incest is produced and maintained by the social order: the order of a male-dominated society. Feminist analyses of incest depict

the power of the Father as in many ways similar to the power of the sovereign: a juridico-discursive power based on command and obedience. That Fathers have a certain amount of this accepted power in the Family means that their sexual abuse of children is not so much a deviation from normal familial relations as an illustration of them (Bell, 1993:62). This demonstrates that incest can signify a man's dominance over women. I do not wish to suggest, however, that this is the only way in which allegations of incest can be interpreted. In contrast with accusations that a man has raped strangers, incest involves violence against a man's 'own' women. As such, allegations of incest are not necessarily directly comparable with allegations of stranger rape. Cockburn (1983:185), in an analysis of men in the printing industry, explains that while men want women's sexuality as free currency - e.g. pin-ups on the factory wall - they feel protective towards their 'own' women, whom they want to see as pure and unsullied beings. Therefore, men who make allegations of incest against men are invoking a discourse of perversion as well as or instead of a discourse of domination.

The actual content of the allegations made against Robert cannot be easily interpreted as feminising in the same way as the actual content of Jane's allegations against Alex can be interpreted as feminising. For while allegations of poor sexual performance currently automatically feminise men, allegations of rape and incest can be interpreted as masculinising men. I wish to argue, however, that the allegations made against Robert were not a form of masculinisation. Lyman (1987:156) suggests that the social function of sexist jokes among men is to control the threat that individual men might form intimate

emotional bonds with women and withdraw from the group (Lyman, 1987:158). One of the men Lyman interviewed said that the most misogynist jokes came from the men with the fewest intimate relationships with women (Lyman, 1987:156). Of the four men who sexually harassed Robert, only one (the manager) was married. He did not have children. Robert, in contrast, had formed emotional bonds with women (a wife and three young daughters). When I interviewed him, Robert spoke about the close relationship he has with his children. He explained that he, rather than his wife, who he said loved them in a different way, would spend a lot of time discussing problems with his children, helping them with their homework, and taking them on trips. Robert would have given indications of this close relationship with his daughters in his everyday interactions with co-workers. This would have made it clear that Robert would find allegations of incest extremely distressing. I suggest, therefore, that the sexual allegations made against Robert reflect what was perceived as threatening to male solidarity, his emotional bonds with women. (Robert hinted at this when he explained that a year after he left the factory, he met one of his co-worker sexual harassers at a social event. The man, he said, was apologetic, 'he's married himself now, he's got a young child, maybe that's changed his outlook on what he's done'.)

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analysed heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by men or women. I have not sought to challenge the statistical

prevalence and political importance of the male sexual harasser/female sexual harassee model of workplace sexual harassment. For it is indeed unlikely that the workplace sexual harassment of men by men/women is as widespread or physically threatening as the workplace sexual harassment of women by men. My preliminary data has, however, clearly demonstrated that heterosexual men can encounter workplace sexual harassment perpetrated by men or women. I have shown that this experience is harmful to men: Alex committed suicide and Robert contemplated suicide. The men's suicide/suicidal feelings does not, however, position them as extraordinarily weak individuals. Stanko and Hobdell's (1993) interviews with thirty-three male physical assault victims have already demonstrated that it is not unusual for men to feel harmed by victimisation. (Ten of their interviewees said that their experience had radically altered their lives and to some extent changed their personalities. For five, this was a totally negative outcome, leaving them with feelings of anger, vulnerability, fear and mistrust. Three men experienced severe psychological problems, two of whom were referred to psychiatric departments (Stanko and Hobdell, 1993:408).) Mezey and King (1992), in a study of male rape victims, have suggested that, 'the stigma for [male rape victims] may be even greater ... in a society which expects its male members to be self-sufficient physically and psychologically' (Mezey and King, 1992:10 cited in Lees, 1997).

This chapter argues, therefore, that it is now untenable for feminists to continue to disregard men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. This contention is not merely a 'liberal desire to be fair in acknowledging that individuals of either sex may

harass' (Brant and Too, 1994:14-15). Instead, I think that my small-scale study is able to make original interventions into the workplace sexual harassment debate. For example, although I would not seek to deny the existence of 'office Juliets' (Wise and Stanley, 1987) lavishing unreciprocated sexual attention on shy, sexually inexperienced men, Alex's experiences show that the workplace sexual harassment of men by women need not always be conceptualised as a woman taking a fancy and embarrassing a man (Cockburn, 1991:152): Jane's workplace verbal sexual allegations against Alex illustrate sexual contempt. Furthermore, Robert's experiences demonstrate that when men sexually harass men, this need not always be interpreted as the workplace sexual harassment of gay/effeminate men or 'horseplay' (i.e. intense physical contact): the workplace sexual harassment Robert encountered involved verbal (*hetero*)sexual allegations which were continually repeated even though Robert consistently failed to be amused.

These accounts demonstrate that sexual allegations have a distinctive place in heterosexual men's accounts of workplace sexual harassment. Sexual allegations are rarely central in women's accounts of workplace sexual harassment (see Chapter 3). In this sense, this type of workplace sexual harassment is gendered male. As certain men do rape women and sexually abuse their children and because all men are expected to be good sexual performers, all men are open to allegations such as those encountered by Robert and Alex. The allegations Robert encountered would be much less likely to be made to a woman. A woman could, of course, be accused of child abuse and rape, but it would be much more unthinkable to make these allegations to a woman because women are assumed to be

maternal (and, therefore, not given to child abuse) and are not thought to possess the physical strength to rape a man. The allegations Alex encountered would be less stigmatising if made to a woman because a high sex drive is characterised as a central part of male, not female, sexual identity. The sex of the accuser is significant in Alex's experiences. As Alex was heterosexual, the most harmful remarks about his sexual performance could only be initiated by a woman. Though other heterosexual men could use this strategy to harass him - for instance by repeating Jane's allegations - they could not possibly comment in an informed way on his sexual performance (without, perhaps, giving the impression of homosexuality). Therefore, such allegations made by a woman invests them with extra power.

This centrality of sexual allegations in men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment is, I argue, a very significant finding of this chapter. It reveals that the workplace sexual harassment of men by men or women is underpinned by a restrictive discourse of 'acceptable' masculinity which constructs particular individuals as less than the ideal of masculinity when they do not, for example, conform to the 'male sex-drive' or 'male bonding' models of masculinity. When particular individuals are defined in this way, they are in fact being perceived as 'women'. I have argued that the workplace sexual harassment of men in the form of verbal sexual allegations feminises those men who find such allegations distressing. This process of feminisation is underpinned by the conceptualisation of 'appropriate' masculinity in play in the male victim's workplace. For example, as men are expected to be sexual predators, Jane's allegations of poor sexual

performance feminised Alex. This feminisation was facilitated by Alex's employment in a caring (i.e. feminised) occupation. As masculinity is enhanced by sexual dominance of women, the actual sexual allegations of rape and child abuse which Robert encountered are not necessarily feminising in themselves. Instead, Robert was feminised when it became apparent that he was distressed by the type of joking which is prevalent in all-male factory environments.

Chapter Five

The Social Construction of Workplace Bullying

Introduction

In the last two chapters I have developed a reappraisal of women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and an analysis of the almost ignored phenomenon of men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. At this point in the thesis I turn to detailed investigation of experiences of workplace bullying, firstly, in this chapter, by examining the social construction of workplace bullying and then, in the following chapters, by focusing on specific aspects of its social context and dynamics. In developing my analysis of these phenomena I will make some comparisons between experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying where appropriate, but I will supply a more systematic discussion of how these different phenomena relate to one another in my conclusion (Chapter 8).

Against this background, I will now outline the key questions I address in this chapter. How has the concept of 'workplace bullying' emerged? How do men and women workers conceptualise 'workplace bullying'? Does the workplace bullying discourse imply agreement on the appropriate solutions to such workplace bullying, or are competing conceptions of workplace 'problems' and their solution involved? How might the workplace bullying discourse be developed?

In this chapter, to consider these research questions, I firstly draw from existing self-help psychology/social issues literature, newspaper and newsletter articles, television and radio programmes, trade union policies, publications and conference reports in order to explore the evolution and present character of discourses of workplace bullying. (I am very aware, though, that it is difficult to establish the 'present character' of these discourses because workplace bullying discourses are currently constantly evolving.) I discuss the processes by which discourses are currently socially constructing workplace bullying as a statistically significant, escalating, harmful and distinct type of workplace harassment and a legitimate grievance. An analysis is offered of whether workplace bullying should be considered a new problem, or instead whether it might be viewed as a new interpretation for an existing problem. In the second section of the chapter, drawing mainly from my interviews and questionnaires, I analyse the achievements and implications of the current workplace bullying discourse. A consideration is offered of the ways in which the current definitions and interpretations of 'workplace bullying' might be made more helpful to men and women who encounter experiences they wish to define as 'workplace bullying'.

A significant theme throughout the chapter concerns the extent to which the workplace bullying discourse can be linked with rather different conceptions of effective responses and remedies, each underpinned by a distinctive view of the best means of achieving change within organisations. In the course of my discussion I identify four such approaches to organisational remedies for workplace bullying. The first can be called the 'rational organisation' approach. It stresses that organisational members share a common

interest in excluding bullying from the workplace, because it represents an irrational and damaging intrusion into organisational life. It therefore suggests that organisational procedures should provide sufficient and appropriate remedies for the problem. Of course, appeals to 'organisational rationality' may also be made by those who wish to challenge the whole discourse of workplace bullying, for example by defending the need for 'macho managers' to impose discipline and remove 'dead wood' from an organisation in the interests of efficiency and competitiveness.

The remaining approaches differ from the 'rational organisation' perspective in stressing that effective remedies for workplace bullying may need more than an appeal to a shared organisational rationality, but they differ in the additional features which they highlight. A second approach, that of 'individual empowerment' emphasises the capacity of individual employees to challenge bullying within the workplace, especially when supported by social networks and a changed climate of discussion which encourage such empowerment. A third approach, which may be termed a 'collectivist' view, suggests that effective employee empowerment, in this as in other areas, depends more on collective organisation and representation through trade unions within and beyond the workplace. Finally, there is the 'legal rights' view, which suggests that both individual and collective empowerment is more likely to be successful if employees can appeal to formal legal rights defined from outside the organisation, rather than being wholly reliant upon organisational support. As this outline implies, these approaches are not entirely mutually exclusive, but they do capture distinctive emphases, and they are related to different conceptions of the social

relations and interests of organisational members. While the first perspective involves unitarist assumptions about shared interests, the other approaches suggest that conceptions of workplace bullying may be contested within organisations, but they differ in how far they see such disagreements in terms of a plurality of varied priorities and rationalities or fairly clear cut conflicts of interest between, for example, managers and their subordinates.

Interpreting workplace bullying

Setting objectives with impossible deadlines; removing areas of responsibility and giving people menial or trivial tasks to do instead; taking credit for other people's ideas; ignoring or excluding an individual by talking only to a third party to isolate another; withholding information; spreading malicious rumours; constantly undervaluing effort; persistent criticism (MSF examples of workplace bullying behaviour, 1994).

Persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions, which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress (MSF working definition of workplace bullying, 1995).

The history of the term 'bullying'

Workplace bullying was recognised and studied elsewhere before it became a recognised issue in the UK. In particular it became discussed in Scandinavia. Hoel (1997:15), in an analysis of workplace bullying in these countries, suggests that interest in 'mobbing' (i.e. workplace bullying) in Scandinavian countries reflects an early recognition of psycho-social issues as part of workplace health and safety. Considerable research into incidence has been government funded in Scandinavia (Rayner and Hoel, 1997:183). Research carried out by the Department of Psychology of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health found that one in ten of those attending occupational health care centres had been the victim of some degree of workplace bullying (*Labour Research*, 1994:15). In Sweden, research carried out among a cross-section of the workforce found that 3.5 per cent - around 150,000 people - were being bullied at work (*Labour Research*, 1994:15). Subsequently, laws specifically against bullying/mobbing were established in Sweden in 1993 and in Norway in 1994 (Rayner and Hoel, 1997:183).

In the UK, workplace bullying first entered onto the harassment agenda in the early 1990s initially without any clear reference to debate elsewhere. Two radio programmes were broadcast on Radio 4 in 1992 - *An Abuse of Power* and *Whose Fault Is It Anyway?* These programmes were made after Andrea Adams, who worked for the BBC and had some personal experience of workplace bullying, approached Cathy Drysdale - a Radio 4 producer - to propose a radio programme on workplace bullying.

Drysdale's account of her reactions to this proposal (Adams, 1992) illuminates ways in which workplace bullying has become accepted as an established workplace harassment problem. Drysdale explains that she was initially sceptical. For she had not heard any evidence that bullying was a problem between adults in civilian workplaces. She notes that in 1989 school bullying between pupils had just begun to hit the headlines as a significant problem in education because a child had been murdered in a Manchester playground. As a result, Kidscape, a charity concerned with children's welfare, had issued guidelines for dealing with bullies at school and education authorities had begun to encourage new policies on school bullying between pupils. This illustrates, then, the power of serious events - in this case, murder - in establishing the legitimacy of terming particular behaviours as unacceptable and taking action to combat them.

The media had also covered the efforts by the Ministry of Defence to eradicate bullying in the armed forces. Additionally, prisons and young offenders institutions had been revealed as sites of prevalent bullying. However, these discourses had positioned schools, the armed forces and prisons as highly specific (authoritarian) settings for particular types of bullying. For example, prison bullying occurs because prisoners have little to do, little supervision and live together in a closed environment. Prison bullying commonly involves inmates using threats to persuade fellow prisoners going on home leave or receiving visits to bring back drugs with them; and lending money, or giving drugs, tobacco or alcohol to other prisoners and demanding repayment with interest (HM Prison Service, 1993:1). Prison bullying can lead to suicide. Discussions of prison bullying are not, however, only

concerned with the individual effects of prisoners threatening each other. Instead, prison bullying is considered problematical by HM Prison Service because it can create no-go areas in prisons. This can lead to staff losing control (HM Prison Service, 1993). Thus, the specificity of bullying in such contexts meant that the concept of bullying did not automatically migrate to a consideration of how bullying might be similarly or differently problematical in adult, civilian, non-prison workplaces.

It might be assumed that increased interest in school bullying between pupils and bullying in prisons in the late 1980s might have positioned the NUT and Prison Officers Association, for example, as cross-over points between school bullying between pupils/prison bullying between inmates and workplace bullying. However, this did not occur. When I contacted the Prison Officers Association to ask whether or not they had a workplace bullying policy for members, the assistant secretary wrote back assuming that I had written to his organisation by mistake - he provided me with an address for the Prison Service Agency, so that I could send for information on anti-bullying initiatives concerned with prison inmates (Freeman, 1997). Therefore, in this particular context it is not yet understood that bullying is a workplace problem.

While the NUT has recognised that both teachers and pupils may experience harassment in schools and although their Code of Professional Conduct does include examples of unprofessional conduct which might now be construed as workplace bullying (e.g. senior staff imposing excessive work on teachers or criticising their work in the hearing of

pupils), when I contacted them in 1997 they did not have a workplace bullying policy (though one was planned). The NASUWT, however, does have such a policy, but the document (NASUWT, 1996a) does not mention the emergence of concern about bullying between pupils as a catalyst for interest in workplace bullying between adults. The emerging workplace bullying discourse has not, then, been explicitly linked to the more established discourses of school, prison and armed forces bullying. (Below, I discuss whether, for example, school bullying between pupils and workplace bullying share similarities and consider the implications of deploying the same term ‘bullying’ to cover pupils’ experiences in schools and adults’ experiences in workplaces.)

Adams’ proposal, then, offered a very original idea for a programme. Therefore, Drysdale agreed - though with reservations - to think about producing a radio programme on the topic. Adams provided some preliminary research in the form of taped interviews. Drysdale reports the thought processes through which she progressed while listening to the first of these interviews:

Would I be genuinely convinced by the story I heard, or would I have to conclude that this was a person who seemed to encounter trouble wherever they worked? Ten minutes into the first tape I was doodling on the pad in front of me, beginning to feel irritated. Anne, a woman bank employee, recounted how her manager had ridiculed her in front of the others for her vegetarian eating habits. Her response at once suggested that Anne must be over-sensitive. Did she really have to resort to eating her lunch in the ladies’ loo to escape his taunts? ... As it transpired, she was not alone, and as she catalogued the verbal destruction

of many other members of staff, a picture of the manager in question slowly emerged: an autocrat capable of extreme unpleasantness who was mercilessly aggressive and frequently out of control (Drysdale in Adams, 1992:4).

This account begins to reveal ways in which workplace bullying has become established as a significant and important harassment problem. At first, because there is no statistical evidence to suggest that bullying at work takes place, it is met doubtfully (even though it is known that behaviour termed 'bullying' occurs in other contexts). Then, as the data proffered seems idiosyncratic and not sufficiently shocking, doubt turns to irritation. Next, as it transpires that this particular event is not isolated or random, the complexity of the experience and the psychology of the bully awakens interest. On the basis of this evidence, Drysdale agreed to produce two programmes on workplace bullying for Radio 4. After the programmes were broadcast, she received a high volume of telephone calls and letters from bullied men and women. She expresses surprise at this and comments that if this unprecedented response was an indication, the scale of the problem must be frightening.

After these programmes were broadcast, Andrea Adams wrote the strategically titled self-help psychology/social issues study *Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome It* (though this form of title seeks to empower the targets of workplace bullying, it also seems to imply that now workplace bullying has been labelled and discussed, the next logical step is its easy eradication.) She also began to offer advice and support to bullied workers. These initiatives signalled the beginning of the 'individual empowerment' approach to workplace bullying. Gratitude to Adams - who died in 1996 - has become a

strong feature of the current workplace bullying discourse. Field (1996:x), for example, dedicates his self-help book to her: 'Pioneer, Saviour, Inspiration'.

Central Television broadcast a programme on workplace bullying - *Raging Bullies* - on 16/11/92. They also produced a factsheet which viewers could request. Next, the BBC commissioned Staffordshire University researchers to conduct quantitative research into workplace bullying. This research found that out of 1,137 locally employed people surveyed, 53 per cent said that they had been bullied and 77 per cent said that they had witnessed bullying at work (for a summary of the results see Rayner, 1997:14). This quantitative research revealing prevalent workplace bullying has clearly been very important in establishing workplace bullying as a legitimate type of workplace harassment. It offers evidence that the problem really exists, rather than being confined to a self-selected group responding to radio programmes. This survey also discovered that changes in the employment context, for example the appointment of a new manager (31 per cent) or a recent change in job (51 per cent) were frequent occasions for the onset of workplace bullying. It was stressed that both men and women, managed and managers could be the victims and perpetrators of workplace bullying. Drawing on this data, the BBC broadcast a television programme on workplace bullying - *The Business* - on 2/6/94 and produced a factsheet on the subject which viewers could request.

Members of the MSF trade union had also begun to contact their representatives about experiences of harassment which they did not readily perceive to be racial or sexual

harassment. Therefore, MSF decided to carry out a survey to assess the prevalence of the types of experiences their members had encountered. Over 70 per cent of respondents to the survey indicated that they had either suffered various degrees of bullying or had witnessed it in their workplace. MSF held a conference on workplace bullying - at which Andrea Adams made the keynote speech - in 1994 and published guidelines for their members in 1995. Many other trade unions (e.g. NATFHE, BIFU and NASUWT) have also now published guidelines for their members and have negotiated workplace bullying policies with employers.

In August 1995, a dispute arose at the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) in Newcastle, Staffordshire. This attracted considerable media attention, and thus made a contribution to the establishment of workplace bullying as an example of harassment at work. Twenty-six workers claimed that they had been bullied by a male manager. They voted to go on strike, but were prevented from doing so when the CIS took out an injunction. The MSF trade union then tried to bring a personal injury claim against the manager on behalf of one male employee who had become ill as a result of the bullying he had encountered at work. They described this action as 'groundbreaking'.

In November 1996, the IPD - the major professional body for personnel managers - carried out a survey on workplace bullying. This revealed that one in eight people had been bullied at work in the last five years. The BBC broadcast a series of programmes on bullying (at primary/secondary school, in the armed forces, in civilian workplaces, in

nursing homes for elderly people and in personal relationships) on Radio 5 Live and BBC2 in August 1997. A booklet entitled 'Bullying: A Survival Guide' (Duin, 1997) was produced. In December 1997, the TUC ran a 'bad bosses' hotline for one week. Five thousand calls were received, the majority of which (38 per cent) concerned workplace bullying (*Labour Research*, 1998:7).

Workplace bullying has been the subject of countless national tabloid and broadsheet and local newspaper articles. A strong discourse of physical violence and psychological damage has been invoked: 'Bullying woman boss drove man to psychiatrist' (*Telegraph*, 12/2/92), 'Thousands live in terror of bullies at work' (*Evening Standard*, 7/7/93), 'Office warfare and how to survive' (*Guardian*, 15/4/95), 'Bully row workers in fresh ballot after peace talks fail' (*Sentinel*, 9/8/95), 'Our Mr Angry is staff health hazard: boss sued over rages' (*Daily Mirror*, 13/9/95), 'War on bully bosses' (*Daily Mail*, 13/9/95) and 'Dreading the 9 to 5' (*Guardian*, 3/12/96). My own press release was also presented in this way in one newspaper: 'Workplace bullies: Have you suffered?' (*Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 6/7/95). A picture foregrounding a very large, angry man twisting the ear of a very small, scared man illustrated one article on bullying in universities (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 14/3/97). However, at no point in this particular text is there any suggestion that bullied academics are weak individuals. Workplace bullying has not, therefore, been presented by the press as evidence of 'over-sensitivity' by workers - even though there is plenty of scope for this in the way bullying is commonly understood, as illustrated by the type of picture accompanying the above mentioned article. This situation is in direct

contrast to early media interest in sexual harassment which portrayed sexually harassed women as humourless (see Wise and Stanley, 1987). This is a consequence of both the sophisticated presentation of workplace bullying by researchers and trade unionists as a prevalent, escalating problem related to the changing nature of work (discussed below) and research evidence (cited above) showing that workplace bullying can be perpetrated and experienced by both men and women. As workplace bullying is not just a 'woman's problem', it cannot be easily trivialised in the way characteristic of early media interest in sexual harassment.

The visibility of workplace bullying has recently prompted individuals to set up support/campaigning groups and telephone helplines. For example, a support and campaigning group has recently been founded in the North of England and another is planned for the Midlands (Field, 1997a). Helplines include the Workplace Bullying Advice Line, Imperative, Bully Alert UK, Stop the Bullying Helpline, Andrea Adams Trust National Helpline and REDRESS (this latter organisation is for bullied teachers.) The Workplace Bullying Advice line was started in January 1996 by Tim Field, who has also recently published a self-help, psychology/social issues book on workplace bullying - *Bully in Sight* (1996). Paralleling Adams (1992) the book's optimistic subtitle is: How to predict, resist, challenge and combat workplace bullying. By March 1997, Field's advice line had received over 930 calls (Field, 1997a). Field also produces a regular newsletter - *Bullying Times* - in which he reports on successful case settlements and new research findings. Such initiatives demonstrate that the 'individual empowerment' model of

organisational change begun by Andrea Adams has now become a well-established way of dealing with workplace bullying. This model is particularly popular because there is little legal protection for bullied workers and trade unions and employers have not yet uniformly taken up the problem of workplace bullying. Workers have, therefore, realised that they must mobilise to support one another and to force workplace bullying onto the workplace harassment agenda. Following the death of Andrea Adams, Tim Field has become influential in these projects. After experiencing bullying in his job, he has carved an alternative career for himself giving talks, workshops and interviews about workplace bullying.

The activism, research, industrial disputes and sympathetic media coverage described above has led to the drafting of the Dignity at Work Bill. This Act is designed to protect workers from bullying and harassment at work. It states that an employer commits a breach of the right to dignity at work of an employee if that employee suffers during his (or her) employment with the employer harassment or bullying or any act, omission or conduct which causes him (or her) to be alarmed or distressed including but not limited to any of the following: (a) behaviour on more than one occasion which is offensive, abusive, malicious, insulting or intimidating; (b) unjustified criticism on more than one occasion; (c) punishment imposed without reasonable justification; or (d) changes in the duties or responsibilities of the employee to the employee's detriment without reasonable justification (Dignity at Work Bill, 1997:1). The Dignity at Work Bill completed its third reading in the Lords, but fell in the Commons on 10/2/97 (Field, 1997b). At the time of

writing, it is on hold pending the emergence of new government policy. The Dignity at Work Bill illustrates one perspective in which workplace bullying can be addressed and remedied. This perspective implies that ‘organisational rationality’ (e.g. managers realising that workplace bullying is a problem and taking action to combat it) cannot be relied upon because there is no guarantee that superiors will enforce shared criteria of rationality. Thus, an external and objective procedure - e.g. an Act of Parliament - must be available to provide public remedies. It is not perceived, however, that the Bill will effectively bring an end to the practice of workplace bullying. As a trade union official I interviewed commented:

There’s legislation against killing people, and people still kill people. Legislation is a fallback position. It does another thing, it forces employers to address the issue where some may be reluctant to do so, or some may think that it isn’t a serious issue. I think the law is an assistance. Employees become educated into what is acceptable behaviour and what isn’t. For instance, in manufacturing 20 years ago the pin-ups would have been all over the walls and that’s very rare now, especially in workplaces of any size.

The ‘legal rights’ model, then, is intended to act *alongside* the other models of organisational change mentioned above. Indeed, the advice lines, newsletters and self-help books discussed above are proving so successful as support mechanisms for bullied workers that they are unlikely to cease when or if the Dignity at Work Bill is passed and when or if workplace bullying is uniformly taken up by trade unions and employers.

New practices or a new interpretation?

The recent flurry of activism, research, media and trade union activity might suggest that bullying is a 'new' workplace problem which did not exist prior to entering into British harassment discourse in the early 1990s. Existing ethnographic studies of workplaces (e.g. Cunnison, 1966; Beynon, 1973; Pollert, 1981), however, offer ample evidence that the practices which are now sometimes defined by the term 'bullying' (see the MSF definition above, similar variants of which have been adopted by many trade unions and employers) are not particularly new. Pollert, for example, explores the 'arbitrary victimisation' of women working in the factory she studied, for breaches of discipline, standard of work and because they 'failed to please':

Val: ...There's certain people can get away with murder, like they don't do nothing about it. But with others - when you go in the office to the foreman, well he looks at you as though you were nothing, you know what I mean? As though he could spit on you. ... And yet another girl'll go in for the same thing, and he'll, you know, tell her nice. Do you know, I went in there once, and you know what he says to me? 'We could do without girls like you' (Pollert, 1981:144-5).

Similarly, Cunnison (1966:229) reports that workers in the garment factory she studied experienced 'favouritism' in work allocation. A woman commented, 'If the boss doesn't like the way you part your hair, you don't get any work'. The arguable lack of impact for men and women workers of terms such as 'arbitrary victimisation' and 'favouritism' arises

because - unlike sexual and racial harassment - these types of experiences have not previously been fully presented and analysed as statistically significant and important workplace problems. The psychological damage which is now known to afflict those who encounter workplace bullying was not recognised. These are reasons for Drysdale's comment that:

Most of [the men and women who rang her in response to the Radio 4 programmes] had never before felt able to tell their stories, even though some of the incidents they recalled had taken place twenty years earlier (Drysdale in Adams, 1992:4-5).

I argue that it is not that these men and women had previously 'felt unable' to give their accounts, but that there was no established language with which to give the accounts and no data to suggest that such experiences were legitimate grievances. This point will be demonstrated below when I discuss my interviews with workplace bullying victims. The absence of established language should not, however, be taken to imply that 'victimisation' always went uncontested before it attracted the transforming label of 'workplace bullying'. Beynon (1973:156-157), for example, discusses a lay off at a Ford factory. A skeleton crew of workers were to be retained in the plant during the shut down. Beynon explains that in selecting workers to form the skeleton crew, the supervisor sought to settle old scores with men who had given him trouble. Seeing this, the shop steward and the workers violently opposed the supervisor's authority to personally choose workers to form the skeleton crew. The shop steward discussed the matter with the

supervisor, and eventually it was agreed that the names of the skeleton crew would be picked out of a hat.

The particular issue I seek to draw out, however, is that though there has always been resistance - though in varying degrees, for example the factory discussed by Beynon was unusually well organised and had a militant trade union - to unfair workplace practices, the practices themselves have not previously been clearly defined by the increasingly powerful word 'harassment'. Rather, though the unfair nature of the practices has been noted, these experiences have often been presented as an integral part of the social relations of work. These social relations have been contested collectively in well-organised environments, but in less well-organised environments a level of victimisation has been viewed as an inevitable and not easily contested part of being at work. To some extent, of course, this latter view remains. In the IPD survey, for example, 26 per cent of those who had encountered workplace bullying agreed with the statement that, 'It's only over-sensitive people who complain about bullying - most people just accept it as a fact of working life' (IPD, 1996). However, in circumstances where workers are not prepared to accept bullying as a fact of working life and this is unaddressed by collective organisation, such grievances are likely to become the focus of self-help organisation of the sort represented by the 'workplace bullying movement'.

Though terms which preceded 'workplace bullying' were not clearly defined as 'harassment', they have nevertheless played an important role in the process which has

culminated with the appearance of ‘bullying’ as a workplace harassment problem. For they have established the point that work is often unjust as well as frequently unpleasant. They have also demonstrated that certain workplace experiences which are not necessarily covered by the terms ‘sexual harassment’ or ‘racial harassment’ merit one specific, strong, easily recognisable label and interpretation, rather than a profusion of weaker terms.

The salience of changes in work and employment relations

However, while it is clear that behaviours now often termed ‘workplace bullying’ did exist prior to entering into discourse as ‘harassment’, it can also be argued that the current character of these behaviours is seen to be closely related to the changing nature of work in the 1990s. In my data, the prevalence of bullying in particular employment contexts where the nature of work is changing suggests that bullying is strongly (though of course not exclusively) related to changing employment practices, such as the individualisation of employment relations through the introduction of performance-related management systems (discussed fully in Chapter 7), and the increasing casualisation of work through short-term contracts. In this sense, then, workplace bullying can be conceptualised as a new problem, rather than a new interpretation.

Wajcman (1996), in research analysing whether or not management style is gendered, discovered that with almost continuous ‘downsizing’ in companies, managers perceive that ‘macho management’ is in the ascendancy. Legge (1989), in a critical analysis of

human resource management, reports that - in a competitive economic climate - less productive employees will be sacrificed in the interests of the organisation as a whole. This latter study illustrates, then, that conduct which might be termed 'workplace bullying' (e.g. unfairly dismissing an employee in order to cut costs) may be legitimated as 'tough management'. Managers and workers share the objective of keeping their own jobs. Certain other workers and managers are sacrificed in the hope of facilitating this - although there is no guarantee that one dismissal will not be followed by many more. It is claimed that certain people impede the creation of profit, and profit is placed ahead of people.

While many companies have now added workplace bullying to their sexual and racial harassment policies, BIFU reports that although the TSB bank has agreed procedures for dealing with workplace bullying and officially opposes it, 'the increased pressure on staff and managers to meet targets - especially unofficial targets - creates an environment in which intimidation and victimisation are almost unavoidable'. BIFU has argued that policies such as performance-related pay 'virtually institutionalise the practice [of workplace bullying] and provide the means for its perpetuation (*Labour Research*, 1994:16).

McKinlay and Taylor (1996), in a study of the impact of HRM techniques in a greenfield microelectronics plant, discuss the new HRM practice of peer review. Team meetings gave workers an opportunity to exercise collective discipline over individuals with, for

example, poor time-keeping records or suspect attitudes towards co-operation. Workers experienced this as undermining, intimidating and divisive (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996:292). Retaliatory scoring - marking down someone who had scored you low in the previous month - was not uncommon (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996:293). When workers undermined the disciplinary function of peer review by beginning a practice of equalised scoring, a facilitator proposed that team members should keep private notebooks recording their observations of their colleagues. McKinlay and Taylor's data suggests that in the context of changing working practices, workers are being encouraged to bully each other. While many of McKinlay and Taylor's interviewees resisted pressure to do so, a minority did engage in draconian discipline (i.e. workplace bullying) (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996:289). Another example of how workplace bullying is related to the changing nature of work is provided by the NASUWT workplace bullying survey, which reports that:

A staggering 87 per cent of respondents to the survey said that management pressure on teachers had increased in recent years and most blamed OFSTED, increased competition between schools and LMS. All of these are part of the Government apparatus designed to subject schools to 'the discipline of the marketplace'. The declared aim is to make schools more efficient and more responsive. This survey demonstrates that the importation of marketplace philosophies into an under-resourced school setting have been deeply damaging to manager/managed relationships, have fostered an atmosphere of bullying and have led to a stressed and disillusioned workforce (NASUWT, 1996a:10).

An emphasis on the implications of the changing nature of work is an important aspect of the current workplace bullying discourse. For while either discovering workplace bullying or reconceptualising office politics, for example, as workplace bullying offers a strong analytical label and interpretation for new or existing workplace problems, it does not establish the importance of combating the problem. Therefore, researchers and trade unionists have sought to prove that workplace bullying not only exists, but is prevalent, escalating, and damaging to individuals and - perhaps most importantly - organisations. By linking contemporary events and a workplace problem, creating a situation with similarities to a moral panic (as discussed in the literature on 'deviancy' e.g. Cohen, 1972), it is established that workplace bullying merits urgent action - or else it will escalate even further and cause even more avoidable damage.

This emphasis on the changing nature of work does not, however, mean that the individual psychology of bullies has not been explored. The NASUWT document (1996a), for example, points out that there are 'pathological bullies who will persecute and torment any victim they can find for the sheer pleasure of the exercise'. Hoel (1998:5), in an analysis of school bullying and workplace bullying, strongly critiques the media's 'individual centred approach' (i.e. an emphasis on the personality characteristics of bullies and victims and their interaction) when it is at the expense of 'environmentally centred' approaches (i.e. an emphasis on organisational and situational factors which contribute to and stimulate the bullying process). He asks:

Is it not possible that such a one-sided emphasis on personality and deviance may leave us short of any useful strategy for combating bullying other than the instant removal of the perpetrator and the introduction of organisational measures which aim to stop potential bullies entering the organisation in the first place? (Hoel, 1998:1).

I think that in order to avoid the charge that workplace bullies are rare aberrations, most trade unions are emphasising what the NASUWT, informed by Cary Cooper, terms 'situational bullies' (who threaten and bully subordinates when they are under pressure), 'role playing bullies' (who think they are expected to act in a bullying fashion because of the culture of the organisation in which they work) and 'punishing bullies' (who believe that you get more out of staff by punishment and reward). The workplace bullying discourse shows that organisations (in conjunction with the actions of particular individuals) are responsible for workplace bullying. By implication, then, organisations (not just particular individuals) need to change.

One way in which it is being established that organisations should act to combat workplace bullying is by linking workplace bullying to the more established workplace stress discourse. The MSF document on preventing stress at work claims that in the context of increasing unemployment, the pressures on those who remain in employment are growing 'at an alarming rate' (MSF, 1995:1). They report figures from the Labour Force Survey which show that 183,000 people in England and Wales were suffering stress or depression caused or made worse by their work (MSF, 1995:1). Cooper, an occupational stress researcher, has commented that bullying is one of the most significant

factors in stress at work. He estimates that workplace bullying accounts for between a third and a half of all stress-related illness (*Labour Research*, August 1994). The Director General of the UK Health and Safety Executive recently put the cost of stress at work at £4.5 billion (Rayner and Hoel, 1997:187).

A recognition of the cost to industry of stress-related illness is one way in which workplace bullying is currently being incorporated into the equal opportunities discourse as part of the 'business case' (Dickens, 1994) for equal opportunities. The business case argues that managers and employees should support equality as a key to achieving business goals (rather than the more low-key argument that by pursuing business goals in a thorough-going way equality goals will of necessity also be achieved) (Liff and Cameron, 1997). This is illustrated by the publicity for a BBC for Business video workshop on workplace bullying:

...[This workshop] enables your organisation to recognise and confront bullying behaviour and encourage a culture where it is unable to thrive. ... Many men and women who bully will excuse such behaviour as a necessary means of motivating employees in today's highly competitive commercial environment. But *the consequent impact on an organisation can be devastating - low morale; stress-related sickness; absenteeism; poor productivity; and even the loss of good employees. Where cases progress to tribunal or come to the attention of the media, the effect on an organisation's reputation is incalculable* (BBC for Business, nd. Italics added).

The BBC for Business publicity presents a model of organisational change which implies that workplace bullying is an organisational aberration or mistake, when set against the fairly clear shared objectives and interests of reasonable participants, therefore what is needed is some way of recognising and marginalising such aberrations. This illustrates the unitary approach to conflict at work. Edwards (1986), in his study of industrial conflict, rightly comments that the mass of evidence showing that organisations contain competing interests proves that conflict is too prevalent to simply be the result of misunderstanding. From this perspective the BBC for Business claims are naive. 'Macho managers' who perceive workplace bullying as legitimate business strategy to cut dead wood from an organisation would have an entirely different view of what counts as workplace bullying than an unwanted employee who had encountered such a campaign of workplace bullying designed to result in his/her resignation or dismissal.

Importantly, however, Edwards (1986) argues that unitarism cannot be rejected as a whole, because there are substantial areas of co-operation in work relations - workers are not always going on strike, managers can devise means to generate a sense of loyalty to the firm (for example, through profit-sharing schemes). He comments that such schemes are not to be seen as simply the result of manipulation of workers, for there is a very real sense in which workers stand to gain from arrangements that promote co-operation. There are the immediate financial advantages of better wages and fringe benefits, together with the advantages of job security to be derived from working for firms that are not driven by conflict and that are thus able to produce at low cost (Edwards, 1986:21). Indeed, as the

BBC for Business publicity implies, many managers and workers would agree that workplace bullying is bad for business.

Grievance handling and trade union responses

The labour market and employer strategy changes outlined above - in conjunction with new legislation governing trade union procedures - have also altered the character of grievance handling in workplaces. In the 1970s it was possible to mount collective union-based responses to unfair workplace practices (see e.g. Beynon, 1973). In the 1990s, however, these responses would be more difficult because of a fracturing of collectivism (Bacon and Storey, 1996). Bacon and Storey (1996) detail trade union responses to this situation, two of which are particularly relevant here. Firstly, they comment on trade unions restructuring towards the individual member, by reporting comments made by Roger Lyons of MSF:

We shall be highlighting individual representation as a priority for trade unionism. We have developed expertise in individual rights and representation. An increasing number of our members have individual contracts and profit or performance-related pay and they can turn to us for individual advice.

It can be argued, therefore, that individual grievances about such matters as workplace bullying, prompted by the changing nature of work, have carved an important niche for trade unionism in the 1990s. The shift from collectivism to individualism means that

workplace problems which might previously have been a cause for collective action might now be more frequently processed under the heading of 'workplace bullying'. For the very concept of bullying - which usually (though not always) refers to *one* particular person who has been singled out by *one* other person for unfair treatment and complaining about this individually (even though the culprit may have subjected others in the workplace to harassment) - readily lends itself to individualism. The BIFU workplace bullying document, however, complicates this position, by stressing the need for a collective response to workplace bullying. The document states that 'it is only by using our collective strength, providing support to the victims and challenging employers that this issue will be dealt with' (BIFU, 1996:2). This draws in a second trade union response to the fracturing of collectivism, identified by Bacon and Storey. This position situates individual issues as collective issues writ small. Thus, trade unions can be said to be dealing with workplace bullying in ways which can be defined as both individual and collective, but in both cases this takes note of the currently changing character of employment relations.

The workplace bullying discourse, then, offers one model of organisational change in which there is a clear role for trade unionism. This model implies that issues of appropriate conduct cannot readily be settled by appeals to a shared 'organisational rationality' (exemplified above in the *BBC for Business* publicity) because this glosses over real conflicts of interest; and neither can they be adequately settled by appeal to legal remedies because, even if the Dignity at Work Bill is introduced, the law has limitations and offers

remedies which rarely address the realities of organisational life (for example, many bullied workers simply want the bullying to stop. They do not want to have to resort to law in order to achieve this.) Thus, the best solution is pressure to accommodate subordinates' interests through negotiation, in order to force the organisation to alter the way in which it operates. This illustrates a pluralist approach to organisational conflict. This is an approach which, though far from free of conflict, contains mechanisms enabling the contending parties, not too unevenly matched, to negotiate their mutual accommodation in a manner appropriate to a society which aspires to industrial as well as political democracy (Fox, 1985). Management has to contain the possibly divergent, possibly excessive aspirations of the various subordinate groups which make up the enterprise. These efforts inevitably involve it in friction and dispute. Such conflicts are not unhealthy, but expected in a free society. Collective bargaining enables most problems to be resolved in a tolerable manner (Fox, 1985). Such a pluralist perspective fails to recognise, however, that 'macho management' will not perceive the process of cutting 'dead wood' from an organisation as an example of 'workplace bullying', even if employees and trade unions perceive it as such.

Furthermore, 'workplace bullying' is not yet fully established in the employee relations context. Some trade unions (e.g. USDAW, NUT) have not yet produced guidelines on workplace bullying for their members and representatives. The workplace bullying policies I surveyed showed a marked tendency to similarity - definitions based on those made by Adams and MSF, figures from the Staffordshire survey and Cary Cooper's thoughts on

the psychology of bullies. There is not enough research - particularly, qualitative research into the dynamics of workplace bullying - to fully document the character of workplace bullying in the different employment contexts in which different trade unions operate. Therefore, representatives remain unclear about how to deal with workplace bullying in the particular work contexts they represent. For example, one union official commented:

I've met several cases [in office work] and although I sympathise with people, I know exactly how they feel, at the end of the day I'm not able to help them either really because other people don't accept it, other people think that in some way they must be to blame, that they're not good at their job. ... There's one case where a clerical supervisor had a tiff with a male employee, she flatly refuses to speak to him. He can't get the answers he needs to do his job. The stress he's under makes it impossible for him to work. I've advised him to get a sick note. I just don't see any other way of dealing with it for him, other than for him to leave.

Summary

The material analysed in this first section of the chapter illustrates the very sophisticated nature of the presentation of workplace bullying by self-help psychology/social issues writers, trade unionists and the media. All have pointed to the prevalence of workplace bullying and have insisted upon the urgency of combating this workplace problem for the benefit of both individuals and, importantly, organisations. In this way, they have managed to create a problem whose gravity cannot be easily challenged (though, paralleling any

equal opportunities measure, employers can seek to hold it to a 'short agenda' rather than a 'long agenda' (Cockburn, 1990)).

Achievements of the workplace bullying discourse: Making a workplace harassment problem visible

Thirty-five out of the 50 people I interviewed came forward mainly to discuss workplace bullying. These informants were drawn from a wide variety of employment contexts: three schoolteachers - one male, two female - a female nursery nurse, a male postgraduate student, a female personnel specialist, a female marketing officer, a female personal assistant to a senior manager, a male design engineer, a male manager, a female social worker, a male educational psychologist, three civil service project officers - one female, two male - a female scientist, a male fire-fighter, a male careers officer, two female media researchers, seven women secretaries/clerical assistants, three shop assistants - one male and two female - two male shop floor workers and a self-employed male builder. A number of these informants were trade union activists who had been involved in representing workplace bullying victims, in addition to having had experiences of bullying themselves. I also interviewed two pupils - one male, one female - bullied at school by their peers. (As explained in Chapter 2, the two pupils' accounts will not be discussed in the thesis because of the constraints of space.)

The men and women were all aware that workplace bullying had only just entered onto the workplace harassment agenda. For instance, Eric, a careers officer, commented on

experiences he had had in 1966, but which he had not thought of as ‘workplace bullying’ until 1995, when his son was subjected to a different form of workplace bullying - victimisation following an industrial accident compensation claim in a factory. He explained that in 1966:

Two male graduates came in. I’m not a graduate. [The female head of the careers service] was interested in them and she was of course showing off to them - and part of this showing off was to show me up in different situations. The main one being that there was a young woman in the office, who was quite bright, but she would put her in the situation I would normally be in as the careers officer and leave me to do the menial tasks, going on messages, errands.

Though Eric characterised the behaviour he suffered as an instance of being ‘shown up’, the problems he described had lacked a specific and useful label and interpretation in 1966. He had found the situation unfair and distressing. He commented that he had suffered insomnia and had dreaded going to work. His experience, therefore, had shrieked for a label and interpretation which would fully recognise its gravity for nearly thirty years. ‘Workplace bullying’ finally provided this label and interpretation.

Lists of types of workplace bullying behaviours, such as those produced by MSF (see above) and the BBC, have been of great importance in giving men and women legitimate cause to label their experiences as workplace bullying. While lists do have potential to be prescriptive, their liberating power - especially in the initial stages of the construction of a

social problem - must not be denied. As Sarah, a secretary whose manager swore at her and her female co-worker and made excessive and contradictory work demands, explained:

It took me a long time to realise that it actually was bullying, but finally the penny dropped when I saw a programme on BBC2 last year. My sister said to watch it because it might be applicable. I think other people could see it and I half knew that I was being bullied but I didn't want to believe it. So I watched this programme and it was very scary because I realised that it did relate to what was happening to me. I sent for the handout they put out, and they had 10 things listed and it said that if you could tick 3 or 4 of these, there's a good possibility you're being bullied. ...[My colleague and I] ticked off 8 immediately. At that point we nearly broke down in tears, the pair of us, we realised we had been bullied and that we ought to do something about it (Sarah, secretary in a firm of architects).

Sarah explained that prior to watching this programme and reading the factsheet she had not realised she was being bullied. Instead, she had thought that the new manager was a difficult man who did not know office etiquette and had little experience of managing staff. She had hoped that his behaviour would improve over time. However, prior to receiving the factsheet, she had been very concerned by her own and her co-worker's psychological reaction to the man's behaviour:

I had started having these terrible nightmares, I was dreaming about killing him, every time I put my head on the pillow I was killing him. I began to think I was going mad. I thought,

‘I’m losing my marbles’. I mentioned it to my colleague and she said she had the same dream. We read that handout, it said, ‘Dreams of killing’. When people put it down in black and white you realise that you aren’t going round the twist, this is all part and parcel of it (Sarah, secretary in a firm of architects).

Newspaper coverage of workplace bullying has also been very important in allowing men and women to see that their experiences are not isolated and are important. Informants had often collected press cuttings about workplace bullying. A female careers officer wrote to tell me about her experiences:

My male boss picked on many members of staff over the years, but especially me - probably because he was jealous of me and saw me as a threat. I had no particular ambition to succeed him, but I happened to be good at many of the things he did not like, or was not good at, but really needed to do to fulfil his role. This man used ignoring people as a bullying tactic and it was only a year or so ago that I read an article that mentioned this. My longest period of virtual silence was 6 months. I would determinedly say, ‘Good morning’, but he ignored me and commented to a colleague, ‘Why does Jenny insist on speaking to me? I have no wish at all to speak to her’ (Jenny, careers officer).

Ruth, a researcher, whose male boss hauled her into his office but left the door open and accused her of ‘running up bills without authorisation and mismanaging money’, brought a newspaper article to her interview which paralleled her experience. The article dealt with the case of a male local government council tax officer who had taken a job as a milkman

to escape the bullying tactics of his female boss. Ruth explained that she had told her personnel manager that she would prefer to pay her mortgage by working as a waitress rather than stay in her current job and continue to suffer bullying. She saw the newspaper article as evidence that she was not the only person to suffer workplace bullying and to think of responding by finding radically alternative employment:

When this was happening to us we were just so happy that there was a man in the newspaper who had experienced this. I could relate to every part of it. I don't know what the outcome of his case was, I'd be interested to know, because *it's not something that* anyone ever talks about. It's too embarrassing (Ruth, researcher).

Many informants spoke glowingly of Andrea Adams' book *Bullying at Work*. Several interviewees had contacted her for advice about their situations. One informant spoke about hearing her speech at the MSF conference, 'There was this woman called Andrea Adams, and she gave this statement, and it was while I was listening to this that it suddenly kicked into my brain that she was talking about me!'. Informants often said that they had come forward to be interviewed for my research because they wanted to further publicise workplace bullying. For example:

Donald: (self-employed construction worker): I got this [questionnaire] off to you. I thought, 'I've got to write to somebody', perhaps somebody will listen to this. Are you going to do a book? Deborah: Yes. Donald: I'd like to see something in black and white, to

make somebody in authority, the Government, bring legislation in. If it happens once it's going to keep on happening.

Interviewees mentioned all the experiences covered in the MSF examples and definitions. (I discuss the types of experiences they reported in Chapters 6 and 7.) My interviews show, therefore, that many men and women employees draw substantially and gratefully from the current media and research discourses on the content, character and outcomes of workplace bullying in order to label, explain and discuss experiences that were previously not clearly theorised as examples of workplace harassment. Prior to their inclusion in lists of 'bullying' or 'bullyragging' (or 'mobbing' - if more than one bully was involved) tactics, these experiences might instead have been referred to in everyday discourse as, for example, 'victimisation', 'aggression', 'bossiness', 'bitching', 'back-biting', 'banter', 'misunderstandings', 'office politics', 'authoritarianism', 'favouritism', 'prejudice', 'personality clashes', 'intimidation', 'poor management', 'not fitting in', 'one's face not fitting' and/or 'pressure'. In terms of offering one new and recognisable label and interpretation for diverse unfair practices, making certain workplace experiences very visible and making these experiences very visible as 'harassment' for which the perpetrator, not the victim, is responsible, my interviews demonstrate that the emerging workplace bullying discourse (referred to as 'workplace trauma' in the USA) performs valuable and helpful tasks.

Implications of the workplace bullying discourse: Constructing a plausible account

Conceptualisations of workplace bullying also show that a plausible account of this experience often contains a number of distinctive features. In this section, I discuss the content, context, personalities and presentation of a plausible account. I stress very strongly that in drawing attention to these features, I am not questioning the veracity of the informants' accounts. I did believe what they said had happened to them. Many of the experiences men and women recounted would be familiar to anyone who has engaged in paid work and many of the accounts presented followed a similar pattern. Instead, I am concerned in this section to analyse the current *style* of articulating a plausible account of workplace bullying and to assess the implications of this particular style.

The content of a plausible account

My data shows how many men and women interviewees employ the workplace bullying discourse as a means of legitimating their experiences by creating a polarisation between workplace harassment and aspects of the arguably 'everyday' social relations of work. To achieve this distinction, informants often stressed the sustained and involved nature of their experiences. They described initial workplace bullying incidents - which they often felt were intended as retaliation for their previous conduct or opinions. They then outlined an escalation of workplace bullying incidents - which they often felt had been designed to cause them maximum distress. Next, they explained how they had had to involve their trade union representative in a series of disciplinary meetings. The dénouement of

accounts usually involved dismissal or resignation. (I discuss this form of account in Chapter 6.)

The emphasis on persistence in the workplace bullying discourse means that single incidents cannot be easily presented as workplace bullying. The workplace bullying discourse has created the necessity for bullying to consist of multiple incidents. Leymann (1992) (cited in Hoel, 1997) argued that workplace bullying must be a weekly occurrence over a period of at least six months. My research informants seemed to be aware that they must remember *every* incident in order to be believed. This is a result of the current positioning of workplace bullying as a problem to be tackled in industrial tribunals and through grievance procedures. What matters is to have recorded a catalogue of incidents to present to one's solicitor and barrister. For example, Mary, an office clerk, sent me a letter in which she provided an exhaustive list of her experiences of workplace bullying by a female colleague:

Belittled at office meetings; shown up in front of visitors; belittled in front of visitors; constant criticism; impatience shown towards me; given no credit; not spoken to; watched like a hawk; telephone snatched from my hand; told to shut up; not allowed to give an opinion; once she has intimidated me, she laughs and jokes with others; constantly interrupted while working; accused of being slow; job frequently changed; not believed; expected to be a mind reader; left until last; mountains made out of molehills; dirty tricks done whilst absent; accused of being out of office too long; not allowed to learn jobs I know I'll like; always given the jobs which I'm unhappiest at; always blamed first; not

allowed to ask others questions; only allowed to ask questions once; accused of being ill if I cry; none of my suggestions taken notice of; frequently told that others are better than me; insinuated my money isn't earned; told I need counselling; no compassion shown when ill (in 17 years only 9 days off sick); encroachment on my personal life; made to live in fear of going to work; awkwardness shown especially before I take a holiday; snide remarks made to me out of earshot of others; made to feel different from my fellow workers; not allowed to teach jobs I know inside out to others; glared at frequently; spoken to like dirt; not allowed uninterrupted time to catch up on backlog; not allowed paid overtime as others are; spied on; work not done looked on like a mortal sin; my way is always wrong; nit picking used as a last resort; given new jobs at inappropriate time (i.e. when I'm up to my neck); humiliated by being told that I have to be retrained at jobs I know like the back of my hand; whispering behind my back; not allowed to stand up for myself; my human rights have been violated.

Men and women interviewees also knew that they must draw attention to the harm that they had suffered as a result of the bullying. In fact, if interviewees were ever momentarily at a loss for what to say next, they would mention more about how distressing the experience had been. This shows that for a problem to be significant, it has to be proved to be harmful. Action taken by the MSF in 1995, in which it tried to bring a personal injury claim against a bully (explained above), has strengthened this focus on harm. As an official connected with that case observed, whether or not the action would be successful would depend entirely on how much evidence there was of how the man had suffered as a result of workplace bullying. In my research, a male questionnaire informant, working in the civil

The boss employs a lot of partially-sighted people, the bosses take the mickey out of them. They pay them about £1.60 an hour and get a good name for employing them. They employ them for cheap labour, they put them on jobs where you can't breathe properly, jobs that people refuse to do because they're so dirty and dangerous (Dennis, factory worker).

The harasser is frequently depicted as attacking a number of innocent victims. Almost every interviewee made the comment that, 'It's not just me that this happened to, s/he bullied a number of other people'. In this way they sought to prove that they were not personally to blame for the bullying. This indicates that men and women are aware that workplace bullying is not yet fully established as a legitimate form of workplace harassment. They still feel that there is a chance experiences they present as workplace bullying will be interpreted as their own fault. Ironically, however, bullying more than one person has been used in some contexts to claim that workplace bullying is not really a problem. Therefore, bullied workers' concern to draw attention to the number of victims their bully mistreated may currently be an unwise strategy. A union official who had been involved in a case involving a number of workplace bullying victims explained:

The employer turned round and said that - it's a typical employer's response - that he's not really picking on somebody, the fact that everyone has suffered means that he's consistent, it's his style of management. They accepted that it was an unacceptable management style, but they almost defended it, by saying he's not picking on somebody.

The targets of workplace bullying are also keen to present themselves as strong rather than passive:

It annoys me when people refer to victims as being weak, because I don't think this is the case. I am a very determined person. I've had major things in my life - especially my recent illness. I consider that these things have strengthened me. I don't consider myself to be a weak individual. I object to people saying that victims are weak. I think if you are put in a situation like myself and others were, where you're the breadwinner, the only source of income, I don't think strength comes into it. Because the stronger you are, the greater the stand you make, the worse treatment you're going to get (Angela, manager).

The inadequate or demonic harasser and the numerous innocent but strong victims are also often depicted as working in inherently bad organisations:

If they accuse you of anything, you're not allowed to have your own say, what they say is, 'It's not up for discussion', they own the place, you take the bollocking or you piss off. ... They make a lot of money, but they patronise us badly. They made £800,000 profit last year, and they had a party upstairs for all the heads of department, all the chargehands, all the supervisors and of course all the office staff. Cakes, booze. They brought a tin of chocolates out onto the shopfloor, and we were allowed to take *one* (Dennis, shopfloor worker).

The presentational style of a plausible account

In addition to drawing attention to particular dynamics in their experiences of workplace bullying, many interviewees also gave their accounts in a distinctive presentational style. Twenty-one out of 35 informants spoke in the form of a one to two hour soliloquy. These interviewees described a complex, recent personal experience of sustained workplace bullying rather than a single incident of bullying or another form of harassment, or a number of unconnected incidents in a range of workplaces, or an experience which had taken place a long time previously, or an experience that had happened to someone else. They had also often had recourse to grievance procedures.

Though many types of interviews and even everyday conversations contain elements of rehearsal and soliloquy, these interviews were distinctive because of the apparent high level of rehearsal and the sustained nature of the soliloquy. When, on occasion, I did ask for clarification of points as they arose, I found that such interruptions were *unwelcome*. They disrupted the flow of the interviewee's presentation. This might mean that an important incident would be forgotten or told in a less considered way. Informants were concerned to recount every detail of what had happened to them and in the correct order. This concern for sequential, full accounts often took the form of informants referring to their diaries or pages of notes written at the time of the workplace bullying or on the way to the interview:

[Consulting diary] My wife went into hospital for an operation on June 10th and he had a go at me about that, about me taking the afternoon off to pick her up. He said, 'Couldn't

your father-in-law do that?'. I said, 'Of course not. I want to take her'. Then it was a case of, 'Oh, its funny isn't it, you go off watching football and that, but when it suits you you become the doting, loving husband'. Let me find the date [long pause while he looks for it]. You don't mind me looking for this do you? [Interviewer: No]. Here we go. It was July 20th. ... He said, 'You can forget about going to the football tomorrow, because I need you in here'. ... [Looks through diary] There's a bit here. 'Gave [bullying line manager] the cold shoulder all day' (Jim, project officer).

To a certain extent, the rehearsed presentation relates to informants' involvement in disciplinary meetings, grievance procedures and industrial tribunals. For in these contexts the complainant must prove the validity of their account. Furthermore, in all existing literature on workplace bullying, keeping detailed records of experiences has been seen as essential:

Until bullying is recognised as a serious problem it is important to be specific about the treatment to which you have been persistently exposed; you need to have facts at your fingertips. Otherwise, when you come to make a complaint, your explanation of what has been causing you to feel thoroughly undermined may well sound utterly trivial (Adams, 1992:116).

The particular presentational style I have outlined is, therefore, integral to the *types* of experiences many informants experienced (i.e. campaigns of workplace bullying which ended with the employee's transfer, resignation or dismissal) and the ways in which self-

help literature, trade union and legal representatives have *advised* them to report these experiences. The experiences *are* of a sustained and involved nature, the harassers are clearly often unpleasant people (this point has to be carefully made by informants, however, for as Adams (1992:118) counsels ‘...in producing evidence about a real bully you must stick to the facts to avoid any hint of character assassination which might be misconstrued’), the workplaces are poorly managed and no-one deserves to be unfairly treated.

Importantly, however, the presentational style also demonstrates that interviewees retained control of the interview on their own terms. While soliloquising, informants did not appear concerned to assess my reaction to their experiences. This can be said to indicate the efficacy of the current workplace bullying discourse. Informants already knew that their experiences were workplace bullying. They did not need a researcher to tell them whether or not these experiences ‘counted’ as workplace bullying. Most interviewees were very calm and collected when giving their accounts. In this way they refused to engage in a form of ‘survivor discourse’. Survivor discourse is usually conceptualised as speaking out about personal experiences of rape, incest and sexual assault in public settings, e.g. on television and radio talk shows (see Alcoff and Gray, 1993.) Alcoff and Gray, in research questioning whether such discourse signals resistance, note the liberatory power for survivors of speaking out but also express concern about the ways in which the media lead survivors to give an emotional, sensationalised performance. Though a one-to-one interview is clearly not directly comparable to a live popular television performance, both

settings involve a presentation of self to an audience. Interviews in which people discuss distressing experiences often distress the interviewee (see e.g. Kelly, 1988). This is the expected response, as a display of emotion underlines the shocking nature of the experience. In my research, however, only one interviewee became distressed while giving her account and she instructed me to take no notice of this. She waved away my suggestions of a short break and/or a drink and instead carried on talking. The men and women I interviewed frequently commented that they would not have come forward earlier to discuss their experiences as they would have found this too distressing. They had, therefore, consciously chosen the timing of their public discourse, as well as giving their account on their own terms.

Challenging the workplace bullying discourse: Broadening the concept

A restrictive discourse?

The means by which the significance and importance of bullying as a type of workplace harassment is being established shows potential to be rather restrictive as well as helpful. This is because informants' interpretations of the current direction of the workplace bullying discourse do not just usefully provide a dominant definition and dominant dynamics of workplace bullying (which is necessary in order to begin to gain an insight into the character of workplace bullying). Instead, these interpretations also begin to suggest what does *not* currently count as workplace bullying and establish *how* an account

must be presented in order to qualify as an example of workplace bullying. I think that the way in which this delimitation has been made is problematical.

Drysdale's (1992) account of how workplace bullying becomes accepted as a legitimate problem, discussed above, illustrates how the very process of establishing a workplace problem can constrain the terms of the debate. For the means by which the credibility of an account of workplace bullying is established (to victims, onlookers, personnel officers, trade union representatives and researchers) become fixed. Victims have to establish that they do not encounter trouble wherever they work. They have to remember every aspect of their experiences in full detail and in a coherent order. They have to have been harmed by workplace bullying. The experiences men and women describe must not be of a nature that might be described as 'trivial' (unless it has happened to more than one person and then, strangely, weight of numbers apparently establishes that it is not 'trivial') and the workplace bullying must not be a single incident. Persistence has become particularly important in defining workplace bullying. This is illustrated by the comments of a union official:

It tends to be persistent. For a manager to turn round one day and shout and scream abuse at an individual, that may be totally out of character, and may be a one-off incident which the person apologises for and the thing is forgotten. Bullying, I think, is showing more to be of a more persistent nature. It goes on and on, and I think that's where it may differ from sexual or racial harassment - one serious offence can be sufficient there to warrant the claim of harassment.

Clearly, at grievance procedure level, the emphasis on persistence operates as a measure to ensure due process. An employee would not generally be dismissed for one incident. However, when researchers and trade unionists seek to always define workplace bullying through *persistence*, rather than through *content*, this is questionable - particularly as content rather than persistence can sometimes be the defining feature of workplace sexual and racial harassment. For if a very serious, single sexual or racial incident can be interpreted as workplace sexual or racial harassment, it is surely inconsistent and discriminatory for researchers and trade unionists to suggest that a very serious, single non-sexual or non-racial incident cannot be interpreted as workplace bullying. This suggests that workplace bullying is currently viewed as less damaging than workplace sexual and racial harassment.

To count as workplace bullying, the experiences victims have encountered also have to be easily distinguished from infrequent disagreements, social banter and bossiness. Workplace bullying has been sharply differentiated by researchers and trade unionists from these other forms of workplace interaction. The FBU, for example, states that workplace bullying is not harmless fun, or just a form of teasing (FBU, 1996:2). The IPMS Members' guide to harassment and bullying says that:

Eradicating harassment from the workplace does not mean preventing people from enjoying harmless social banter. It is to prevent offensive behaviour which may hurt our colleagues (IPMS, 1997:6).

BIFU, drawing from the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health provisions against victimisation at work, argues that:

It is important to distinguish between bullying as behaviour which is unacceptable from general disagreements which occur at work. As such occasional differences of opinion, conflicts and problems in working relations should be treated as part of the normal working environment, provided that mutual attitude and actions connected with the problems do not harm or deliberately offend any person. Essentially bullying occurs when personal conflicts are not reciprocal; lack of respect for an individual's integrity leads to unethical actions; and an individual's health, physical or mental and/or general well-being are adversely affected as a result (BIFU, 1996:3).

Adams (1992:31-32) has sought to draw a boundary between workplace bullying and 'bossiness':

Being bossy is certainly aggressive, but this type of behaviour is generally short-lived and most people can learn to cope with it without too much difficulty in a working environment. To suggest otherwise would be to lay oneself open to 'wet idealism', and - if a manager is faced with people who are not pulling their weight, or being consistently late for work, or riding the waves until retirement - of being downright unrealistic. 'Bossiness', however, turns to bullying when professional abrasiveness becomes tainted with an element of personal vindictiveness.

The main aim of these careful delimitations may be to gain legitimacy for a concept which is ambiguous and will be contested. These quotes should not, then, be taken to imply that the distinctions can really be made so easily. The FBU and BIFU comments can be seen as attempts to make sure that their members do not feel antagonistic to the characterisation of a set of behaviours as unacceptable conduct. The intention is to circumvent a radical response by employees, who might otherwise have felt that the new set of unacceptable behaviours had been imposed upon them by managers and trade unions against their will in a situation of unequal power and who might, then, have refused to adhere to the new rules of conduct (see Fox, 1985). The new rules are being presented as common-sense rather than 'political correctness'. It may be argued that Adams is addressing her comments primarily to employers, in order to enlist their support for anti-bullying initiatives. For she is insisting that taking a stance against workplace bullying does not equate with retaining poor employees. It has to be said, however, that allegations of poor work performance are the loophole in the workplace bullying discourse Adams presents. The implication is that bullying is not really bullying if the employee is a poor worker. I would point out that it is not necessarily 'wet idealism' to assert that all employees should be respected. Indeed, Adams' statement is surprising because ensuring dignity and respect for employees is one important reason why the concept of workplace bullying has been developed.

Adams also insists (paralleling how most feminists see sexual and racial harassment), however, that if a person says they are being bullied they must be believed (1992:16). This

is inconsistent with a sharp division between bossiness and bullying, because one person's 'bossiness' may be another person's 'bullying' - 'bossiness' is no easier to define categorically than bullying. In defining behaviour, people with different social interests are likely to draw the boundaries between types of behaviour differently. Managers, for example, might wish to draw the boundaries narrowly, defining many forms of management pressure on subordinates as legitimate. Subordinates, on the other hand, especially where they are unable to complain in other ways, may wish to widen the boundaries to limit the scope for management pressure. Furthermore, research on sexual harassment (Stanko, 1988) has shown that the level of stress women report after sexual violence is not related to the 'severity' of their experience. Stanko draws from research by Silverman (1976-7) to explain that women are sometimes greatly distressed by persistent low-level harassment - leering, for instance - and exhibit stress symptoms similar to women who have experiences of sexual and physical assault. By analogy, men and women workers may suffer stress as a result of 'bossiness' as well as 'bullying'.

Despite these significant limitations in her analysis, Adams' insistence that the eradication of workplace bullying is a common-sense strategy which does not radically challenge management rights is important. For it offers an opportunity for the social relations of work to be recast without attracting too much attention or conflict. Adams was, I think, hoping for a 'rational organisation' solution to workplace bullying rather than seeking to promote collective action against workplace bullying.

Single incidents, multiple experiences and irritating events

My interviews with men and women whose experiences and presentations do not meet all the criteria established by the dominant definition and dominant dynamics of workplace bullying suggest that men and women workers are seeking to widen the definition of what counts as workplace bullying. They are, then, taking control of the discourse while it is still fluid. For example, two questionnaire informants and two interview informants described single incidents as 'workplace bullying'. This might indicate that single incidents should be taken seriously as examples of workplace bullying:

On June 5th 1995, the Master told me that the Headmaster wished to see me. He set up an appointment for me to see him at 11.30 am during one of my free periods. The Head was 5 minutes late in arriving for the appointment. This was the first time I had met him professionally though I had met him socially and briefly on two previous occasions. He was appointed head of school the previous September. It was his first headship at the age of 42. In December 1994, my husband was posted to a new job outside the area. I told my boss (the Master) that this was likely to be my last academic year at the school and that I would be leaving as soon as I sold my house. My job was advertised in March (to try to get the pick of people looking for jobs for September 1995). By the end of April I had still not resigned (the last day of April was the deadline for resignations for the end of the academic year.) By then they had shortlisted candidates for my job and selected my replacement. They were now in the embarrassing position of having to tell my replacement that my job was not available until at least New Year 1996. My replacement's notice had

to be in by the end of May. My boss was in telephone contact with her boss to try to extend her notice time in the hope that I would resign. The object of my meeting with the Head was to get my resignation (I realised this later.) I spent about 5 minutes explaining about my husband's job and that I had told my boss as early as last December that I would resign 'when I had sold my house'. They took the risk of advertising my job before I had resigned and they now wanted to pass on this risk to me. I explained that I would be committing financial suicide if I resigned and gave up my salary as I would still have a large mortgage to pay until my house was sold. When the head realised that he was not going to get my resignation, he lost his temper, accused me of putting myself first and the school last, said it would seriously disrupt the children's education to have a change of teacher half way through the year and that the school could not afford to pay my salary and my replacement's. He showed me the door, by this time shouting abuse. I turned as I left his study and tried to apologise for causing him to lose his temper, but he just continued to shout insults after me, yelling 'Get out, get out!'. I told my boss what had happened. I then spoke to a colleague who was very sympathetic and could see that I was shaken and suggested I went home. That evening my boss phoned me and said that the full import of what I had told him about my meeting with the head had sunk in and he wished unreservedly to apologise for what had happened on behalf of the school and the governors. He asked the head to apologise but he refused (Maureen, schoolteacher in private school).

I was in the electrical workshop and my supervisor got hold of me by my overalls. He pushed me against the workbench and verbally threatened me for no known reason. This attack took place when there was nobody else about (George, electrician).

[While working in a temporary job] my boss encouraged me to apply for a permanent job. I wore my suit. It wasn't really an interview, he just told me what the hours were. There was no hint that he was going to get rid of me. ... Later he just told me that he had given it to this other woman. And I said, 'Why?', and he said, 'Your typing isn't up to scratch'. I said, 'Is that all? Is my shorthand OK?', and he said, 'Yes, it's just your typing'. I was so taken aback, I was stunned really, because not one word had been said since I had been there about my typing. I'm not a brilliant typist, but I'm certainly adequate. I thought that if that's the way he's going to be I just don't want to know. I didn't argue. I was just totally stunned. Looking back I should have made more fuss, but I was so stunned, he hadn't given any hint that he was going to treat me like that (Jackie, secretary).

This woman teacher got together with a group of other women teachers and when I went into the computer cupboard - which was a reinforced metal room - they locked me in. When they let me out they were all standing around laughing, including the male head of department. So I left. It was coming to the end of term anyway. ... I didn't want to leave that job at all. I was very, very committed to the children. But it was untenable. That was bullying being locked into a cupboard and people laughing and jeering at you and bullying should not go on in a school (Joanna, schoolteacher).

These experiences, then, show that men and women think that workplace bullying *can* involve a single incident. However, though Maureen's account is a single incident, it can easily be interpreted as workplace bullying because it involves a common dynamic for bullying. The headmaster is trying to force her to resign partly because the school cannot

afford to pay two salaries. In contrast, the single incident account provided by Jackie, the secretary, seems to represent a particularly extended usage of the workplace bullying terminology. For at first glance it appears that she interprets being unsuccessful in securing a job as a form of workplace bullying. This is not so. Jackie understood her experience as workplace bullying firstly because she had been led to believe that she had a good chance of being appointed to the position and secondly - and most importantly - rather than telling her that the chosen candidate had *better* typing skills than her, her line manager said that her typing skills were not (*and, therefore, had never been*) good enough for the job she had applied for. She felt, therefore, that the line manager had sought to humiliate her through this single incident.

A second aspect of the relatively extended character of my informants' accounts when compared with orthodox procedural definitions is the prevalence of multiple experiences of workplace bullying (and sexual harassment). Drysdale's (1992) notion that 'some people may encounter trouble everywhere' (see above) does not take into account her later point that workplace bullying is widespread. If workplace bullying is widespread, then it *is* not just possible but very likely that some people will have had more than one experience of it. To say that more than one experience must mean that the victim is at fault is to individualise a problem which has been largely presented as structural and also often related more to the personality of the bully rather than that of the victim. It is, however, a common-sense conclusion which has been internalised by many workplace bullying victims. This is implicit in the following account:

When I was an office junior, there was this pretty obnoxious woman. I think she picked on me because I was young. She picked on other people because they were young. Then I worked at a college, and the Registrar there was a very unpleasant character. I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe that I had gone from atmosphere to atmosphere, and *yet I get on alright with people, I've never had any problems with the people I work with, I always get on well with people, I've always knuckled down and done my job* (Simone, receptionist. Italics added).

I think Simone felt she had to stress her work commitment and interpersonal skills *because* she had encountered more than one experience which she defined as workplace bullying.

A further important challenge to the current workplace bullying discourse was provided by two informants who had encountered experiences which they defined as 'workplace bullying' but which they did not claim had caused them psychological damage. Jackie, the secretary mentioned above, interpreted an example of office bitchiness as bullying:

I worked part-time on reception and there was this woman who was on reception after me. She would wait till the time I knocked off at 4pm and then just before 4pm she would disappear out of the office to do photocopying and she would keep me waiting till just gone 4pm and then she would sort of stroll back (Jackie, secretary).

I do not dispute Jackie's interpretation of this ongoing problem as 'workplace bullying', but I would wish to register the point that the bullying line manager may have the power to dismiss an unwanted employee, but the unpleasant co-worker does not explicitly possess such a right. The second informant to define an irritating event as workplace bullying was Eric, the careers officer mentioned above. He explained that his area education welfare officer had arranged a transfer for him without prior discussion. Though this incident clearly did not constitute 'workplace bullying' in the same way as this informant's first account, Eric referred to it as 'workplace bullying' because it was a situation which irritated him. Informants are, therefore, seeking to broaden out the types of experiences that should count as 'workplace bullying'. One interview informant stated this explicitly:

I think bullying takes so many forms, the pressure to deliver, and if you don't deliver then pressure. I have to think carefully how to say this, you know, everyone knows after you have been in an organisation for a while the person you have to report to. I think that up to a point that everyone adopts, the junior staff, they adopt unconsciously or consciously, an attitude that says, 'I'll give her what she wants' and that I think is a form of bullying, because you're not actually able to... I know I've found myself doing it (Ruth, researcher).

Ann, whose experiences of workplace sexual harassment were discussed in Chapter 3, had observed colleagues being bullied when she was working in two temporary jobs. The experiences Ann recounts offer further examples of how broadly women and men workers are interpreting 'workplace bullying':

I worked in a temporary job in an insurance firm. They were looking to recruit people who had got mortgages and debt problems. It's called motivating. They wanted motivated spouses as well. If the men were reluctant to come to work, to get out of bed, their wives would make them, and generally push them. When the two top managers came in they were real macho characters, gruff voices, played sports and all that, I do tend to shy away from such creatures anyway, but they can boss the men around. I think that was structural bullying. ...I had another temporary job in a hospital. Sometimes they get temps in when they've got a big problem, when they can't get anybody to work there. There was one young woman there and it was really impossible for her. She was doing the clerical side and it was very busy and she had three separate women bosses who all thought she should give their work priority. The way it was going it would make anybody ill. They were supposed to be administrative officers, and it was all completely wrong. They were fighting over whose assistant she was (Ann, temporary clerical worker).

As men and women are now labelling and interpreting a wide variety of experiences as 'workplace bullying' - rather than, for example, 'office politics' - this indicates that many workers want a very high level of fair treatment at work. They are fighting against the notion that the changing nature of work necessitates a changed (for the worse) nature of employee relations. Indeed, Waddington and Whiston's (1996:170) survey of active trade unionists reveals that even in the context of the introduction of measures to raise employee commitment, 'management attitudes' remain a principal source of workplace grievances.

The disadvantages and advantages of broadening the concept of workplace bullying

However, the wide variety of experiences which some women and men are interpreting as 'workplace bullying' might mean that the concept and conceptualisation risks covering too many kinds of experiences - perhaps even to the point of incoherence. The potential implications of the term 'workplace bullying' covering too many kinds of experiences can be illustrated by reference to the sexual harassment debate. Wise and Stanley (1987) sought to broaden the concept of sexual harassment to include any 'male behaviour forced on women' as well as the more usual conceptualisation of sexual harassment as 'unwanted sexual conduct'. Though the definition can be viewed as liberating for women who have felt 'harassed' by male demands for time and attention, this definition can be criticised for partially obscuring the specificity of men's *sexual* harassment of women. The majority of my bullied interviewees had experienced sustained campaigns of workplace bullying by line managers which resulted in the victim's resignation or dismissal. If this form of bullying is taken as the most common example of workplace bullying, then broadening the concept might make this form of workplace bullying less instantly visible.

It may, therefore, be argued that over-use of the term and interpretation 'workplace bullying' to describe any unpleasant workplace experience is inappropriate because then 'workplace bullying' has potential to become less meaningful and therefore less helpful as a label and interpretation workers can employ to complain about mistreatment at work. However, a recent commentary on 'sexual harassment' (Brant and Too, 1994:1) has noted

that the inflexibility of this term - for example, the workplace origin of the discourse is still so influential that it is difficult to apply 'sexual harassment' to being at home - can act as a barrier to the development of new analyses of sexual harassment. I argue, therefore, that the workplace bullying discourse must be broadened to take account of the types of experiences presented in this section. While the experiences are not always parts of sustained campaigns of bullying designed to culminate in the employee's dismissal or departure, they do begin to illustrate one-off 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying, single-incident 'low key' workplace bullying and persistent 'dripping tap' workplace bullying. As Wise and Stanley (1987:109) explain, an emphasis on 'sledgehammer' behaviours hides away more common, mundane and ordinary intrusions, leaving us with no ready means of conceptualising and understanding them. I argue, therefore, that non-persistent 'low key' workplace bullying and persistent 'dripping tap' workplace bullying are linked to 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying and should be made as unacceptable as sustained campaigns designed to result in the employee's resignation or dismissal. The examples given above can be defined as 'workplace bullying' because they do fit in with the MSF definition given earlier in this chapter - they are examples which are offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, insulting and unfair, which (in many cases) cause the recipients to feel upset, threatened, humiliated, vulnerable, undermined and stressed - even though they do not fit in with the way such definitions have been conceptualised (particularly the current emphasis on persistence). This section shows that men and women are evidently seeking a clear label and interpretation which will legitimate complaining about a range of

unpleasant workplace experiences. 'Workplace bullying' offers this label and interpretation.

Questioning the workplace bullying discourse: An analysis of school bullying

'Workplace bullying' is, therefore, a successful label and interpretation. Researchers and trade unionists have effectively appropriated a term and interpretation which originally related to pupils in schools, the armed forces and prisons and applied this to the behaviour of adults in civilian workplaces. As Edward Said (1983:226-7 quoted in Andermahr et al, 1997) has observed, 'ideas and theories travel - from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another [and as theory travels, so it is] 'transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place'. However, is 'bullying' the most appropriate interpretation for adult men's and women's civilian workplace experiences?

A comparison of workplace bullying and school bullying between pupils

At first glance, schools and workplaces for example do seem extremely different settings for bullying. Arora and Thompson (1987) studied children's experiences of bullying in the first three years of secondary school. Fifty per cent of 14 year olds reported that someone had tried to kick them at least once in the previous week and 36 per cent of the same group indicated that someone had tried to break something that belonged to them. All groups reported extortion - 19 per cent of 12 year old boys presented the highest figure. In contrast, workplace bullying is not often about extortion of money or breaking personal

possessions. Physical assaults do occur in workplaces. In my research, two men (an engineer and a self-employed construction worker) experienced a one-off physical assault. However, much workplace bullying is not physical. As I document in Chapter 6, it can be a subtle campaign which aims to make an employee appear professionally incompetent. Therefore, workers cannot prove that they are being bullied by showing the physical injuries inflicted by the bully.

Research also shows that the dynamics of school bullying between pupils are closely related to girls and boys ways of interacting. Besag (1992:41), in research on school bullying, explains that boys bully because they seek power and dominance, whereas girls need a sense of affirmation and affiliation. Girl bullies exclude their victim from the intimate group or, by use of malicious gossip, try to prove that the victim is unacceptable. The ways in which children relate to each other are not necessarily the same ways that adults relate to each other. Some - but not all - workplace bullies are defined as people who want power and dominance. Social interaction has been identified as one reason why men and women go to work. However, individuals are perhaps more likely to seek very close friendships at school than they are to want to do so at work.

Workplace bullying frequently involves a campaign of bullying designed to result in the employee's resignation or dismissal (see Chapter 6). While a school bully may want his/her victim to leave the school, the bullied child cannot be sacked. School bullying is commonly conceptualised as bullying between pupils - although school bullying can involve teachers

bullying pupils (Stainton Rogers, 1991). Those involved may be of different ages, sexes or 'race', but they are still all pupils. The form of workplace bullying which is currently most visible, on the other hand, commonly involves managers bullying subordinates. The IPD survey of over 1,000 workers showed that the majority were being bullied by senior staff - almost one third were being bullied by the head of department. In my research, sustained campaigns of workplace bullying were most frequently carried out by line managers.

Children are often conceptualised as being in need of adult protection. This means that now the problem of school bullying is firmly identified, it is unlikely that children themselves will be blamed for having deserved the bullying (although there is some evidence of discussion of provocative victims). Adults - particularly men - are not generally conceptualised as being in need of protection.

However, a very significant similarity between the school bullying of pupils and workplace bullying is, I suggest, that both children and adults are being bullied, in part, as *individuals* (even though workplace bullying often hinges on groundless or inflated accusations of poor *work* performance.) The place of personality clashes and abuses of power in workers' experiences of bullying are explored fully in Chapter 6. For children, peer group acceptance, gendered identity and personal worth is undermined by bullying. For men and women workers, occupation is often tied to personal identity. Workers like to feel that they are good at their jobs in order to feel good about themselves as individuals, as one workplace bullying victim illustrates: 'You don't like to feel that you're not doing your

job right. [The workplace bullying] undermined my confidence in myself, my ability to manage' (Harry, civil servant). The relationship between bullying and personal identity may be said to be one way in which school bullying of pupils and workplace bullying are both very similar to sexual or racial harassment. Sex and 'race' are part of men and women's identities, as are their occupational identities and self-images.

The implications of deploying a childhood term in organisational contexts

Though the significant similarity between school bullying between pupils and workplace bullying indicates that the two types of experiences might be labelled in the same way, the problem remains that in *everyday language* the word 'bullying' had already become very closely associated with pupils in schools, inmates in prisons and armed forces personnel before it was applied to adults in civilian non-prison workplaces. (This is not to say that the concept of bullying did not have to 'travel' between these three contexts. Instead, as observed above, these three contexts are similar in that they are all authoritarian.) Therefore - despite the current media and trade union interest in workplace bullying - many employers, employees, trade unions and industrial tribunals might not be taking 'bullying' seriously as an adult, civilian, workplace problem. For example, a trade union official who had been involved in a workplace bullying case explained:

The company don't really like the word 'bullying'. Maybe it's the playground connotations, that it's not something that happens in the workplace. I mean it's not a phrase that until recently has ever really been used about workplaces. From that point of

view they feel vulnerable to thinking that adults can behave in a way that is more commonly associated with children.

Media, research and trade union sympathy could mask organisational unconcern. This is not far-fetched if we consider the history of workplace sexual harassment as a potential parallel (see e.g. Wise and Stanley, 1987). We might think that sexual harassment policies are now well-established in organisations, over twenty years after its emergence as a significant type of workplace harassment. Not so. Research by Davidson and Earnshaw (1991) showed that 88 per cent of UK personnel directors had not issued a sexual harassment policy statement (cited in Collier, 1995).

The implications of employers, employees, trade unions and industrial tribunals not taking workplace bullying seriously as a form of harassment are grave. Anti-bullying policies are not yet widely adopted in organisations. If employers do not take workplace bullying seriously, this could hinder their more widespread introduction. Then, employees would not be disciplined for engaging in bullying behaviour and victims would feel even more unable to complain about workplace bullying through internal grievance procedures. It would also be much more difficult than it already is for employees who have resigned or been dismissed from their jobs to win industrial tribunals which cite bullying as a reason for unfair dismissal or unfair constructive dismissal. In both informal and formal channels for airing grievances, if bullying were to become perceived as a 'trivial' matter, trade union representation would be ineffective, on the one hand because representatives would

not have been provided with training/adequate training to deal with workplace bullying and on the other because their arguments would fall on deaf ears.

While this set of possibilities is clearly setting out the worst case scenario, I argue that it is important to realise that the worst case scenario may occur. 'Workplace bullying' is a fashionable buzz word in the 1990s, but there is no concrete guarantee that it will remain so in the future. Wise and Stanley (1987:23) explain that the last stage in the construction of a social problem is 'decline and invisibility'. As explained in Chapter 1, they observe that by the summer of 1982 in the UK the press had redefined workplace sexual harassment as the expression of men's and women's natural sexual feelings and behaviours (Wise and Stanley, 1987:34). This was a result of interpreting workplace sexual harassment as sex rather than power. Therefore, it is worth considering whether alternative terms might more fully capture the dynamics of bullying at work. One of my informants proposed an alternative term:

It was unprofessional, and I think we should use the word 'unprofessional' more because it is unprofessional behaviour, because when people think about bullying they think about what schoolboys do to each other, but these are grown ups, grown up men and women. It's not playground stuff. This is power play. I don't know what to call it if not bullying. Certainly when I wrote my memo I used the word bullying, but I called it unprofessional behaviour, because that's the kind of term that corporate culture understands (Ruth, researcher).

While the term ‘unprofessional behaviour’ is an important suggestion, such a term - in common with other terms mentioned in this chapter (e.g. personality clashes, office politics) - does not have the impact of ‘harassment’.

Summary

In this second section of the chapter I have sought to problematise the ways in which workplace bullying has recently been presented by the media, researchers and trade unions. Though it might be assumed that workplace bullying has now become an established problem definition, I have shown that bullied women and men workers still feel that they have to present their accounts in particular ways in order to be believed. Nevertheless, in interpreting single incidents, multiple incidents and irritating events as ‘workplace bullying’, workers are adapting the discourse to cover their own circumstances. I have argued that this is a valid strategy, which indicates workers’ growing demand to be treated fairly at work. Workplace bullying has been compared with school bullying between pupils. It has been shown that there are advantages and disadvantages of allying workplace bullying to this pre-existing discourse, which must be thoroughly considered before ‘workplace bullying’ can be embraced as an important interpretation for stressful workplace experiences.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the processes by which workplace bullying is currently being socially constructed; how men and women workers conceptualise workplace bullying; how the workplace bullying discourse involves varied conceptions of appropriate remedies and strategies of organisational change; and how the discourse might be developed. It has been shown that a serious type of workplace harassment has been firmly identified in the UK as a result of media interest, self-help books and quantitative surveys. I have demonstrated four approaches to organisational remedies for workplace bullying, which, I have argued, have useful implications for the reconstruction of workplace social relations. The chapter has shown that although the emerging conceptualisation of workplace bullying is very helpful to men and women workers, it merits careful broadening to take account of a range of experiences workers now wish to define as types of workplace harassment.

This chapter has not, however, exhausted the sets of issues involved in workplace bullying. Two further important concerns, i) the dynamics of workplace bullying experienced by workers at different levels in organisational hierarchies; and ii) the gendered character of workplace bullying, will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter Six

The Salience of Organisational Position to Workplace Bullying

Introduction

What are the stages and core features of the incremental and escalating campaigns of workplace bullying perpetrated by line managers which culminate in an employee's dismissal or resignation? In what ways do the social relations typical of professional and managerial jobs (where men and women possess significant autonomy, but are also likely to have a relatively close work relationship with powerful decision-makers) and the social relations typical of subordinate employees (who are less directly accountable to senior management, but are subject to the exercise of management power in the way they carry out their duties) influence the character of employees' experiences of workplace bullying? What can a qualitative analysis of the experiences of professional/managerial and subordinate employees bullied by line managers contribute to our understanding of the social dynamics of workplace bullying and to the development of the workplace bullying discourse?

In this chapter, to explore these research questions, I analyse six informants' accounts drawn from three employment contexts (schools, factories and offices) which illustrate the experiences of four women and two men at different levels in these types of organisational settings (nursery nurse, head of science department; shopfloor worker, design engineer; secretary and personnel manager). The types of bullies these men and women encountered

can be broadly classified into two distinct types: newly appointed line managers ('new brooms') and existing managing directors ('established despots'). As I observed in Chapter 5, there are as yet very few qualitative analyses of workplace bullying. One purpose of this chapter, then, is to offer such an analysis. The theme of the chapter is the salience of organisational position to workplace bullying. This is intended to begin to demonstrate and amplify Adams' (1992) assertion that workplace bullying affects workers at all levels in organisational hierarchies, but also to explore the specific dynamics of such bullying at different levels. Gender is not, therefore, central to the main body of my analysis here. At the end of the chapter, however, I discuss the interrelationship between class and gender in workplace bullying, prior to fully exploring the role of gender in workplace bullying in Chapter 7.

The chapter structure seeks to capture the 'career' of managerial/professional and subordinate employees' workplace bullying experiences. Firstly, I identify the range of catalysts which precipitated workplace bullying, looking particularly at the interplay between personal factors (i.e. clashing personalities and particular personal circumstances) and organisational factors (i.e. line managers' use and abuse of power). Secondly, I discuss the workplace bullying tactics deployed by the 'new brooms' and 'established despots' and the ways in which the victims responded to the tactics they encountered. I ask whether campaigns of workplace bullying, once begun, need necessarily end in the departure of the employee. Given that all of the data on workplace bullying produced in this research came from men and women who resigned, transferred or were dismissed,

however, assessing how workplace bullying *has* been halted through the actions of either target or initiator is beyond the scope of this study (and merits further investigation), but we can see whether or not there might have been points at which compromises might have been achieved.

My informants are Angela, a white, married, 40 year old personnel manager; David, a white, divorced, 50 year old design engineer; Dennis, a white, single, 33 year old shopfloor worker; Gill, a white, single, 42 year old head of science at an independent school; Hannah, a white, married, 50 year old nursery nurse at a state school; and Sarah, a white, married, 45 year old architect's secretary.

These six accounts have been chosen for detailed analysis in this chapter for several reasons. Firstly, incremental and escalating experiences of workplace bullying by line managers is the type of workplace bullying experienced by the majority of my informants. Twenty-one of the thirty-five informants whose accounts were mainly or entirely concerned with experiences of workplace bullying experienced sustained campaigns of workplace bullying by line managers which resulted in their dismissal or resignation; and while the remaining fourteen informants did not report sustained campaigns of workplace bullying, they too had either resigned from their jobs or - in the case of the two male civil servants to be discussed in Chapter 7 - had arranged a transfer to an alternative position or alternative line manager in the same organisation. Secondly, the appointment of a new line manager has been identified as a common catalyst for workplace bullying (Adams, 1992;

Rayner, 1997) and workplace bullying by a company owner has been identified as a particularly problematical situation for workplace bullying victims to combat (Adams, 1992).

Thirdly, these accounts of workplace bullying in schools, factories and offices have been chosen both because they offer a range of white and blue collar employment contexts and differing social relations of work and also as a result of the frequency with which these work environments appeared in the interviews concerned with experiences of workplace bullying. Seven of the thirty-five bullied informants were drawn from education; eight worked as secretaries/clerical assistants in offices; three were managers in offices; and three were employed in factories. Field (1996:26) claims that education is 'one of the worst affected professions' because headteachers 'wield power to such a degree that, if so inclined they can choose to ignore and overrule parents, governors, staff, educational authorities etc. with every expectation of getting away with it'. Fourthly, the accounts chosen represent a range of positions in organisational hierarchies. Workplace bullying is, therefore, shown to affect a wide variety of workers - not just those in very subordinate positions. The six accounts, then, represent relatively common and analytically important patterns which are representative of the data produced in my research. As yet, however, there is insufficient research data to establish if such accounts are more widely representative.

**Catalysts for campaigns of workplace bullying by new brooms and established despots:
Clashing personalities/perceptions of personal circumstances/perceptions of organisational
positions and abuses/uses of power**

Hannah, David, Gill and Sarah had all been working in the organisations where they were subsequently bullied for appreciable periods, ranging between seven and thirty years. They said that they had not previously encountered problems in these workplaces. Their experiences of workplace bullying arose after the appointment of their new line managers - a woman infant school co-ordinator, a male drawing office manager, a female headteacher and a male architect respectively. The emergence of the employees' problems after the appointment of new line managers suggests, therefore, that the role of new managerial appointments in accounts of workplace bullying is worth exploring.

Interpreting the role of the new managerial appointment

One way in which to view the role of the new managerial appointment is to see his or her managerial style as a significant reason why they were appointed to or - more frequently perhaps - asked to take the job. Managers intend the succession to disrupt existing custom and practice arrangements. Exactly how the new broom will sweep clean, however, is not necessarily always entirely fixed before the new appointee takes up his or her post. Certain work practices may already have been identified as unacceptable and certain employees may have already been identified as men and women who should be disciplined, encouraged to seek alternative employment or dismissed. Over time, however, as the new

recruit becomes more familiar with the organisation and employees, further practices will become unacceptable and further unwanted employees will be identified. The removal of such employees might be understood by employees and trade unions as an 'abuse of power', but will be understood by the new line manager and his/her superiors as a legitimate 'use of power'. This way of viewing the role of the new managerial appointment is explored through an analysis of the experiences recounted by two of the professional employees - Gill, the schoolteacher and David, the design engineer.

A second way in which to view the role of a new managerial appointment is to see the managerial style of the chosen candidate as not directly relevant to their success in being appointed to a job - the appointment has been made on the basis of qualifications and experience. Managers have not explicitly appointed the successor to discipline the workforce. Even so, the successor will, over time, identify employees who he/she feels should not be employed in the organisation. This may be a legitimate concern (e.g. when an employee is demonstrably a poor worker) or, it may be an arguably less legitimate concern (e.g. when the line manager does not personally like an employee) which is then disguised as a more legitimate concern (e.g. poor work performance). In these latter circumstances (and also the former, if due process is not ensured), the removal of an unwanted employee might be understood by employees, trade unions and - in some cases, the new recruit's superiors - as an 'abuse of power', but will be understood by the new line manager as a legitimate 'use of power'. This way of viewing the role of the new

managerial appointment is explored through an analysis of the experiences related by two of the subordinate employees - Sarah, the secretary and Hannah, the nursery nurse.

New brooms and professional/managerial employees

Gill's account demonstrates the first of these two conceptualisations of succession. Gill explained that she felt that her new headteacher had been chosen to disrupt custom and practice in the school:

We had lots of complaints.... If children had to pay 30 pence for a new exercise book, the parents would write in and complain. If the teacher sneezed the parents would write in and complain. It was to an extreme degree. And what we all realised after the old head left was that he was very good at actually fielding complaints from the parents, and pacifying them basically. And the new head who came in was not really up to the job, that was the long and short of it, she didn't really know what she was doing, and when she had complaints from parents... I think this was one of the reasons why the governors appointed her, the chairman of the governors wanted someone who would listen more to the parents.

Gill's perception that the new headteacher had been appointed to make the school more directly and demonstrably accountable to parents was clearly confirmed (several months after the new headteacher's appointment and whilst she was bullying Gill) when a young science teacher experienced discipline problems with a particular class and parents complained. The headteacher discussed the matter with Gill. She said:

We've had complaints about this science teacher, do you think if I saw her on Friday afternoon I could get her to resign?, because I can't stand all those complaints, it's too much, I just don't know what to do, so do you think she's the sort of person that would resign? ... I said, 'Wouldn't it be a good idea to actually discipline the children that are playing her up, radical as it might seem?' She said, 'Oh, that's a good idea, umm'. This woman was a total drongo, she just didn't know how to run a school.

This interchange may indeed suggest that the headteacher did not know how to run a school. It may, however, indicate that the school governors had made the new appointment primarily in order to impose discipline on the staff - who were, perhaps, perceived to be undisciplined because they attracted complaints from parents - rather than the pupils. Disciplining pupils might mean that their parents would withdraw them from the school, and at an independent school the withdrawal of children also means the withdrawal of school fees. In this culture of regular parent complaint - which was now being taken extremely seriously by a new headteacher at the request of the governors - it was inevitable that eventually a parent would complain about Gill and that this would be taken very seriously by the headteacher. This occurred when the parents of a lower sixth former complained that their child was not making good progress in A level chemistry:

The head had me in ... I said, 'Well, how can she possibly do Chemistry A level if she's not going to work?' So that was one complaint. That was sort of dealt with, and that was the end of it, as far as I was concerned. Everyone found the same as me with this girl, and

it was just the sort of thing that parents would write in about, and they'd see the head, and in past times nothing else would have happened.

This complaint offered the first possibility that Gill - a teacher whose pupils regularly achieved A grades at GCSE and A level - could be dismissed for inadequate teaching. It does not explain, however, why the headteacher would wish to dismiss Gill in particular, given that the pupil in question had not made an effort in her two other A level subjects either. Gill cited a range of reasons why she felt the headteacher did not want her in the school. She drew attention to her own outspoken nature:

There were staff there who regularly took time off when they weren't ill, who regularly didn't turn up to lessons, who regularly had children who failed abominably, who missed university places, who were clearly grossly incompetent, and nothing was done about them. I clearly did my job well, but was a bit too outspoken. I was very outspoken, mainly because the atmosphere in the school was so oppressive that the only way that I could get through the day was by cracking jokes. And we'd sit round at lunchtime and there would be a few of us who would have sandwiches in the staffroom and the head would notoriously never come out of her room, and I would say 'Has anyone seen our leader today?', perhaps we ought to put a poster on the wall saying, 'Who is this woman?', 'You are the head and I claim my £5' and that sort of thing and it got to the stage where she wouldn't come out of her room during breaktime because she knew that she would be asked difficult questions that she couldn't answer. So I'd be cracking all these jokes about the head and obviously people were going back and reporting everything that I was saying because that was the nature of the place, it was very secretive, so I don't think that got me

any brownie points either, but that was my way of coping with the stress of the place really.

This example shows that because Gill perceived the new headteacher as a poor headteacher, she did not accept her authority and consequently made jokes at her expense. Making jokes about the headteacher could be viewed as 'insubordination' (this form of 'conduct' can be a reason for an employee's dismissal under s 57(2) (b) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978), but it is a form of behaviour which is widespread in staffrooms. Woods (1979:216) reports that 'much staffroom humour takes the form of mocking, embarrassment or compromise of senior personnel'. In Gill's case, however, her jokes at the headteacher's expense - which she never intended to be heard by the headteacher, and which were only made in the hearing of staff, not pupils (and were therefore not necessarily 'unprofessional') - became problematical because they were reported back to the headteacher - perhaps even in a heightened form - by someone else. As Gill stated that she was aware of this informing, it could be argued that she could have been a little more cautious about making jokes in the staffroom. Even so, Gill had not yet realised the extent to which the new headteacher's rule would involve teachers being required to compete with one another for the headteacher's favour. Later, she encountered a graphic example of this new system. A physics teacher told her that the head had told her, 'If you dish the dirt on Gill, you can have her job'.

Clearly, the headteacher - especially if she, in common with Gill, perceived that she was not yet a capable headteacher - would have found reports of jokes at her expense made by

a head of department undermining and threatening. The headteacher's concern about these jokes may be interpreted in the way described by Price (1979; quoted in Ball, 1987), in a study of the first 18 months of a new headship. Price describes how a new headteacher's views of how to run a school conflicted with the views of the existing deputy headteachers. These deputy headteachers circulated deliberate misinformation about the new headteacher. They constructed a particular image of the headteacher by virtue of their control of information (Price, 1979, quoted in Ball, 1987:153).

The headteacher's perception that Gill did not accept her authority was further increased by one particular incident in which the head had sought to exercise her authority in perhaps the most effective way available to any headteacher - by expelling a pupil she considered to be disruptive. (Though this incident might be taken to show that the headteacher was prepared to discipline pupils as well as staff, it must be noted that the expulsion is underpinned by racist discrimination. It is, therefore, not an indication of how *all* pupils at this school would be disciplined for violence):

A girl was raped. When she came back to school, she had behavioural problems, she was going off to see the psychologist, she was truanting, which the psychologist said was perfectly normal and it was just a stress reaction and that we just had to try and ease things along and be fairly understanding with her. Some of the kids in her class started taunting her about the sex and the trial, they must have found out somehow. One day she came into school, and hit the ringleader of these nasty girls. She just lashed out in the playground and hit this girl, and obviously this caused a big stir. So the head had all the

girls in who had witnessed it and took statements from them and did it all officially. She left her in the lessons and then at 11 o'clock in the morning she called her out of the cookery lesson she was in at the time and took her up to the deputy head's room, and they interviewed her, but I think they'd already decided what they were going to do - which was to expel her - because the other thing was that she was black, and there was an awful lot of racial discrimination and nastiness with any of the black children. So after they'd interviewed her, they locked her up in the deputy head's room until gone 1 o'clock. And she didn't have her mother with her, and she was completely by herself locked up in this room, and she was just like a caged animal and to me that was just like repeating the pin down of the rape. I didn't know that any of this had gone on, I knew that she had been taken out, but I didn't know the exact details. I had my lunch and I went out to the staff loos. When I was in there the head came bustling in and banged on the door and said, 'Come on out of there, I don't know who's in there but you must come out, I've got to bring a girl in here, it's an emergency'. As I came out, I saw the bursar standing at the top of the stairs by the door. And I said, 'What are you doing loitering outside the women's toilets?'. He said, 'I'm here to run after her when she makes a bolt for it'. I said, 'What do you mean?'. He said, 'They know that she's going to run away, so I'm here to chase her'. It just didn't register with me at all. I stood there talking to him. And true enough, because she had been locked up all morning, she just came thundering out of the toilets and ran away, and he went thumping down the stairs after her shouting 'Come back here, young lady' and he chased her all over the school, through the dining room, through the locker rooms and everything, it was just gross, I just can't describe how bad it was. And I was the only person who actually saw it. I just happened to be there. I'll never forget it. He just went thumping down the stairs. And eventually he caught her, he brought her back upstairs

and then they locked her up again. Then at afternoon break the head came into the staffroom and said, 'I've expelled her, I will not stand for physical violence'. Everyone on the staff just sat there completely gobsmacked, and I looked for some sort of reaction, and no-one reacted. And I thought that you can't treat another human being like that, and sort of just get away with it. And then there were various mutterings of 'I think she did the right thing'. I was just appalled partly because of the way she had been treated, and also because they were just waiting for an excuse to do it and her hitting the girl was obviously an excuse and I think the other thing was the lack of reaction amongst the other staff. That to me that was just a dreadful thing that had happened, and they were just willing to go along with it and tacit approval of what the head had done.... I had a row with another teacher that day after school. I said to her 'What do you think about the way she was expelled?' And she said, 'I think the head was absolutely right, we haven't got the facilities here to look after children who are disturbed like that'. I said 'We sell our school because it's small, we're supposed to be caring, and you're telling me that we can't look after a girl like that? Where's the Christian spirit?' (because it was supposed to be a Roman Catholic Church school) and she said 'The Church is about discipline as well you know'. So I said 'Well, that to me is not the Christian way of doing things, I've never seen anything so disgusting in all my life, if that's Christianity, you can keep it'. In the staffroom at the time there happened to be someone whom I didn't get on with, who happened to be very friendly with the head and she must have automatically gone in and snitched and said what I had said. ... On Thursday nothing happened at all. Then Friday morning I had a message to go and see the head and that's really when [the workplace bullying] started.

These two examples of incidents which Gill felt were significant reasons for her identification by the headteacher as an objectionable teacher are both based on other people's reports of Gill's rejection of the headteacher's authority. The problematic nature of this rejection of authority relates to Gill and the headteacher's locations in the organisational hierarchy. From her account during my interview with her, it was evident that Gill felt she was able to reject the headteacher's authority because she had more experience of teaching, more experience of being in a position of authority (head of department) and more compassion for children's problems than the new headteacher. The new headteacher found this unacceptable because she had attained a higher organisational position in the school than Gill. Rejection of authority is a professional issue. Gill felt, however, that the workplace bullying she subsequently encountered from the headteacher was also motivated by a personal factor. She explained:

I wanted to go to bereavement counselling. So the head started having a go at me. She said, 'Why do you need this time?' I said I'd had bereavements, and it's affecting me. And she said, 'Well haven't you got friends you can talk to? Haven't you got brothers and sisters?' I said, 'My sister died at 21'. 'Well what about your parents, can't you talk to your parents?' I said my mum died when I was 15. She kept on and on until I was in floods of tears and I think in a way that it started then because she perceived me as weak. And I think she was doing a lot of projection as well, because she had a lot of grief over her own mother that she wasn't actually dealing with, and I think she picked up, there was a certain resonance. ...as soon as she saw me crying, I think that's probably when she thought I don't really want her around, she's too much of a reminder of what's going on with me.

This conversation about Gill's personal circumstances and the expulsion of the rape victim both reveal the headteacher's absence of compassion. This, then, begins to blur the line between workplace bullying underpinned by individual personalities and hierarchical positions. For the headteacher, Gill's rejection of her authority is as important as her perceptions of her personal circumstances in defining her as a teacher who should be dismissed (though under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, 'insubordination' could constitute grounds for fair dismissal, but the headteacher's perception of Gill's personal circumstances could not constitute grounds for fair dismissal). The workplace bullying she subsequently encountered can be viewed as both an 'abuse of power' - though the headteacher herself, because she did not want her authority undermined, would have seen it as a legitimate 'use of power' - and a consequence of the headteacher's perceptions of Gill's 'personal circumstances'.

The interplay between hierarchical positions and individual personalities underpinning experiences of workplace bullying can be explored in a different way through analysis of the account given by David, the design engineer. While Gill had encountered problems with her headteacher after they became acquainted with each other, David felt that he had experienced an immediate 'personality clash' with the new line manager who subsequently bullied him. He explained that, 'For three years I had no problem at all, I did my job, did everything OK, no criticism whatsoever. Then this man came in, and he and I never hit it off from the very first day'. Though this 'personality clash' could in itself have precipitated

workplace bullying, the ‘personality clash’ escalated into workplace bullying partly because the new line manager sought to bring in new working practices and working conditions which David opposed:

I was the senior rep for my union. The company decided to offer performance-related pay, and with that weapon they offered the members of the union more money if they came out of the union. So obviously greed took over, and they all decided that they would accept the money. The company then decided to derecognise the union, that left me as the only rep on the site. The main area of the factory, however, was a different union. The workers voted not to accept performance-related pay and to stay in a block with the parent company. Consequently, if they attacked one of those blokes, they not only upset the guys in that area, which were only a few, but also in the main area which would mean that they would have 100 blokes walking out ... The company was required to set up Health and Safety. I volunteered to go on the committee because I had had experience of Health and Safety in my previous job. I was voted as chairman. The company didn't like that after a while, because I was then saying, ‘You need to alter this and that’. They didn't like that, they wanted somebody who would close their eyes and say everything's alright, but the place was a tip all the while, there were hammers on the floor, and tools on the floor.

These comments show that David's strong trade union activism and zealous health and safety role left him isolated in this newly non-unionised factory where employers did not now wish to comply with a stringent application of health and safety regulations (the implications of this isolation are discussed in detail below). David did not relinquish his

concern for health and safety or his trade union activism even though his new line manager objected to these activities. (This is not to suggest he should have done so. I am merely registering the information that he did not.) This can be related to David's occupation, particular position in his organisation and the problematical status of line management in design engineering. Though David is not a manager, he had a strong sense of himself as an extremely competent professional employee, a highly experienced health and safety representative and trade union representative. Smith (1987:239), in a study of technical workers, observes that as line managers' work is mainly clerical/administrative (though they need a technical background, their technical knowledge is not exercised in their daily dealings with their staff), design engineers (who consistently exercise technical knowledge) hold line managers in low esteem. As such, paralleling Gill - who positioned herself as an experienced and successful teacher who could therefore reject the authority of her headteacher - David felt that his opinions were valid and important, and would not retract them even though they were at variance with the new working practices and conditions imposed on the organisation by the new line manager.

David felt that he had encountered workplace bullying because of his trade union activism and health and safety role. This illustrates an 'abuse of power' by his new line manager, which the line manager himself - because he wanted a non-unionised workplace where health and safety would not be a high priority - would have perceived as an appropriate 'use of power'. (Under the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, an employee cannot be fairly dismissed for trade union membership or activities.) The

‘personality clash’ which David mentioned at the beginning of his account reinforced the manager’s workplace bullying on the basis of health and safety and trade union activism. This ‘personality clash’, however, deepened further because David chose to express personal opinions about a professional matter which he need not necessarily have made his concern:

They knew I was opposed to violence. I don’t like violence. I was doing a bit of agitation over the years. I said the company ought to diversify from manufacturing armaments. We should be sending people equipment so that they can build houses and roads instead.

This personal opinion, viewed alongside Gill’s jokes about her headteacher, suggests that workers may make a contribution to the range of factors which precipitate their experiences of workplace bullying. This does not mean that I am seeking to blame the victims of workplace bullying for attracting the attention of the individuals who then bullied them, I am merely registering their contribution. I stress that while expressing opinions about the nature of a company’s business and making jokes about one’s superiors may be unwise, I am not advocating that workers consciously and consistently police their spoken opinions to avoid becoming the victims of workplace bullying.

Expressing reservations about the nature of a company’s business is a professional issue. David also felt, again paralleling Gill, that the workplace bullying he encountered was motivated by a personal factor:

My marriage broke up and it made me very ill. It took me a long time to get over this illness. That gave [the bullying line manager] the impetus to have a go at me, because I was so ill. I was determined to get my health back, and slowly I did. Also, I moved from where I lived, I started all over again. I think I was developing this attitude where I thought I would fight my way back. He didn't like that, he wanted a subservient character.

New brooms and subordinate employees

While rejection of authority in the forms of differences of professional opinion, trade union and health and safety activism, alongside clashes of personalities and perceptions of personal circumstances, can, therefore, be shown to have provided the catalysts for the experiences of these two professional employees, two of the subordinate employees - Hannah, the nursery nurse, and Sarah, the secretary - encountered immediate problems with their new line managers which cannot be readily attributed to either clashes of personalities/perceptions of personal circumstances or differences of professional opinion. This suggests, then, that the dynamics of subordinate employees' experiences of workplace bullying by new brooms may be at least partially distinct from new broom workplace bullying encountered by professional workers.

The early years co-ordinator appointed at the state school where Hannah was employed as a nursery nurse made it clear on her first day that she had decided exactly how the infant school would run under her control:

The head took a back seat. We had an acting deputy head and a very new early years co-ordinator, who was a very inexperienced teacher, very young, she hadn't worked in the early years age group in the past. This was a new post. We hadn't had a co-ordinator in the past. She was put above the deputy head. The nursery teacher and I had a meeting with her. When we arrived at the meeting we were told that we weren't to speak at all, except to answer questions, that it was a 'listening meeting', for us to listen and not to speak. She proceeded to ask the nursery teacher about things I did, had I been given permission to speak to a child's parents? The teacher asked, 'What about?'. The co-ordinator said to me, 'In future, you won't speak to a child's parents at all. All communications must go through a teacher'. In future I mustn't speak to the rest of the staff. All communications to the rest of the staff must go through the nursery teacher. I mustn't speak to secretarial staff, everything must go through the nursery teacher.

There were significant similarities in the initial encounter between Sarah and her future bully. She felt that the new architect appointed at her firm came in with clear - though in this case, unspoken - plans for the department:

I was the senior secretary and had been at the firm for seven years and knew the place, the people, the ropes, everything. And he came in two and a half years ago, and he made it clear from day one that he wanted all the old team out, and he wanted his own people in. He got rid of absolutely everybody, the only two remaining were myself and Lucy, a clerical assistant.

The situation appears extremely unfair to Hannah, however, because it disrupts the existing 'indulgency pattern' (Gouldner, 1954) in which Hannah had exercised perhaps rather more autonomy than might be usual for nursery nurses - possibly because of her very long service in the school. Gouldner's (1954) research into patterns of industrial bureaucracy identifies two types of organisational discipline. The first refers to disciplinary efforts having some evident connection with the work process, and which workers feel are intended to gain efficiency. The second refers to discipline which is imposed on workers for its own sake or merely as a way of proclaiming the superiority of those who wielded it (Gouldner, 1954:47). Hannah had not previously encountered the second form of discipline. She had been accustomed to interacting with children's parents, and therefore she found the removal of this aspect of her work extremely demeaning and distressing.

Established despots and professional/managerial and subordinate employees

In contrast with Gill, David, Hannah and Sarah, the experiences of workplace bullying recounted by Dennis, a shopfloor worker and Angela, a personnel manager, did not occur after the appointment of a new line manager. The male managers who bullied them owned the companies where they worked. These two workers' experiences illustrate a further type of catalyst for workplace bullying - a specific incident or incidents which bring an existing employee unfavourably to the attention of a despotic managing director. Dennis and Angela both commented on an entrenched culture of worker exploitation and victimisation in their workplaces, which they said was caused by their managing directors:

They make a lot of money, but they patronise us badly. They made £800,000 profit last year, and they had a party upstairs for all the heads of department, all the chargehands, all the supervisors and of course all the office staff. Cakes, booze. They brought a tin of chocolates out onto the shopfloor, and we were allowed to take *one* ... If they accuse you of anything, you're not allowed to have your own say, what they say is, 'It's not up for discussion'. They own the place, so you take the bollocking or you piss off ... I remember this one day we'd got two stillages [containers] with work in them, and this lad sat on one stillage to lean over into the other stillage, to get a work card out just as the owner was walking past. And he grabbed hold of him, and said, 'Get off the premises'. Sacked him just like that. We have no rights whatsoever. No power. Our direct bosses are frightened of their position. They're told what to do and they'll go against you even if they know you're right just to keep in with the owner (Dennis, shopfloor worker).

He took it in turns to victimise people, and sometimes it passed on to someone else, you kept your head down. ... I can remember very shortly after I started there, it was at lunchtime and I had been out, and when I came back he was having what I thought was an informal chat with a member of staff about cricket, and I did a bowling action and he hit the roof. He said, 'I am your managing director. Don't ever behave like that to me again', really completely out of order for the act itself. He really had this thing about showing respect, the respect that he thought he was due, or that he thought a managing director - he had this thing about 'a managing director', if anybody parked in his space, that set the whole place buzzing for the day, tearing about, very aggressive walk, really aggressive, 'some bastard has taken my parking place'. I mean, it could be a young trainee. He would tear them off a strip from a dizzy height, people he had never met, on their first day. I can

remember some giving their notice in on the first day because they were so upset by him, his attitude. And if you dared say anything about it he would say it was as well they left then, because they weren't going to survive in this organisation (Angela, personnel manager).

Dennis and Angela's subsequent experiences are both underpinned by the despotic behaviours of these two managing directors who appear not to believe that employees ought to either have rights or be treated with respect. The dynamics of the problems the two workers encountered are, however, different because of Dennis and Angela's different locations in their organisational hierarchies. Dennis explained that he had never come to the attention of his managing director until, after working for the company for three years, he had had an industrial accident:

I was encouraged to put a claim in. I wasn't having a go at anyone. Well, all of my mates were in engineering and if they had a problem they put a claim in and you get a bit of money in compensation. Two of the under-managers told me to do it. They said, 'After all, that's what we've got insurance for'. ... The owner of the company found out about it and came down and blew me out on the shopfloor, and sacked me. I was told to sod off, to get my stuff and not come back, I'd be sorry, I'd never get another job in engineering. Off he stormed, with a shopfloor manager who ran back in about two minutes and said, 'No, you're not sacked. He's just lost his temper. Carry on'. That was three years ago and I've never been forgiven for that. I've been picked on ever since.

Dennis's experience of being individually singled out for continuous workplace bullying, therefore, arose entirely because he put in a compensation claim for his industrial accident. In the absence of this compensation claim, he would simply have continued to encounter everyday exploitation (as outlined above) in a collective and indiscriminate way alongside his work colleagues (which he would probably not then have described as workplace bullying).

In contrast with Dennis - but in common with the other two professional employees - Angela drew attention to personal and organisational factors (rather than one, momentous incident) which she felt had led the managing director to single her out for workplace bullying:

There were times when I had to challenge what the MD did - it would either have been unethical, or illegal to do what he wanted me to do. He and the chairman would just take it into their heads that someone was not performing properly and they would expect you to get rid of them almost overnight. They really didn't care that it couldn't be done unless you wanted to pay quite hefty sums of money, because you'd end up in a tribunal, which we frequently did, because he didn't take our advice - and that would be your fault. ... An employee had taken us to a tribunal and I in fact had anticipated that if the company sacked her in the way that they did then she would take us to a tribunal. The solicitor came to us a week before the tribunal, and she would have settled for £4,000. In view of the circumstances, along with the company secretary, I urged the MD and the chairman to settle, and the MD wouldn't hear of it. The company secretary and I again emphasised that

we thought we should settle, for monetary reasons and for the company image. We went to court a week later and ended up paying £12,000. After this meeting - this is an example of the sort of person he is - he came tearing back and said to me 'Don't you ever contradict me like that again. If you can't agree with me, then shut your fucking mouth'. It was that sort of thing 'You'll be out the door'. ... To me it seemed to become more personal about 4 years ago. I'd been in hospital. I had a cancerous tumour. The only possible thing I can think of is that a few months before this his wife - who was my age - died from cancer. Whether he thinks its wrong that I'm alive and she's not, I don't know. But you weren't ever able to discuss the problem openly with him. I remember going in there and saying 'What is it that I've done?'. He just turned it round and said, 'The problem is not with me, it's with you. It's your problem'.

Therefore, the catalysts for Angela's experiences can be understood as related to her position in the organisational hierarchy (because, as part of her role in the company, she is obliged to offer professional - sometimes unwelcome - opinions regarding decisions the managing director has to make), and related to her personal circumstances (her recovery from illness). These two catalysts occur as a direct result of Angela's responsible position in the company. Her work role, in fact, makes antagonising the managing director unavoidable - particularly given his propensity to dismiss employees without considering the legal consequences of his actions. Her visibility to the managing director means that he is well aware of her personal circumstances.

The demands and implications of a responsible job as catalysts for workplace bullying are absent from the accounts given by the subordinate employees - Dennis, Sarah and Hannah - because subordinate workers have much less scope for exhibiting unwelcome professional autonomy than employees in more senior positions and because the details of the personal circumstances of subordinate employees are less likely to be known to their line managers through informal, everyday contact than those of professional and managerial employees.

Summary

The data analysed in this first section, therefore, shows how employees' locations in their organisational hierarchies are salient to their different experiences of the beginning of what subsequently becomes a campaign of workplace bullying. While the new broom/established despot typology cross-cuts the professional/subordinate distinction, the dynamics of workplace bullying by new brooms and despots takes different forms which are related to employees' different levels in employment hierarchies. The design engineer, the head of science and the personnel manager experienced catalysts for workplace bullying which are characterised by an interplay between a line manager's dislike of an employee's personality and/or personal circumstances and a line manager's dislike of an employee as a professional. However, in contrast, the nursery nurse, shopfloor worker and secretary were chosen for workplace bullying entirely as a result of their particular positions in the organisational hierarchies. There is, however, a significant commonality in

all the victims' accounts of workplace bullying. The victim was perceived by the bully to have stepped out of line, e.g. the nursery nurse had spoken to children's parents and the design engineer had been a zealous health and safety representative.

How new brooms and established despots set employees up for dismissal on the grounds of poor work performance or force/encourage them to leave: Serial allegations and ineffective complaints

After the initial catalysts outlined above, the six informants experienced a range of incidents which they described as constituting a campaign of workplace bullying. This section considers how the dynamics of the six campaigns are related to the victim's position in the organisational hierarchy (professional/managerial or subordinate); the type of bully the men and women encountered ('new broom' or 'established despot'); and the outcome desired by the bully (dismissal or resignation).

Set up for dismissal

Gill's account illustrates how her new headteacher sought to set her up for dismissal. The day after Gill expressed an opinion about the headteacher's expulsion of a pupil, she was summoned to the headteacher's office. The headteacher complained that Gill was not attending morning assembly - even though Gill had obtained her permission for non-attendance (she said that while she had been attending grief counselling, the music in assembly made her feel tearful). The headteacher had also found out that Gill had been

giving homeopathic remedies to a pupil. Gill admitted that this was perhaps unwise, but justified her actions by saying that this child had recently been bereaved and had been storing up paracetamol tablets. She had tried to help her.

This meeting occurred just before half-term. During half-term Gill accompanied a group of sixth formers on a water-sports holiday. One of the pupils, distressed by her parents' impending divorce, caused trouble during the trip. When Gill returned to school she wrote a report to cover herself, because this pupil was 'known to be manipulative' and had caused trouble for other teachers in previous years. When the headteacher read the report, Gill felt that, 'I was made to feel that it was just a sort of personality clash between me and the child'. Shortly after her return from this trip, Gill found a typewritten letter in her pigeonhole, requesting her attendance at a disciplinary meeting to answer 'serious allegations' which had been made against her:

I did try and get an agenda beforehand - which is what the union suggested - but they wouldn't tell me what the nature of the meeting was, they refused to say what the complaint was. ... So I went in and I said I would like to know the exact nature of the complaint. I had a pen and pad. The head just looked at me and she said, 'It's a very, very serious complaint, you are unfit to be a teacher'. I said, 'Pardon?' and she said, 'You are unfit to be a teacher'. I said, 'Is that the actual wording of the complaint, or is that your interpretation?' She said, 'That is my interpretation of it. You are unfit to be a teacher'. And that is how it opened. And I thought 'Oh God, we're onto a winner here, marvellous'. I thought, 'I'm really not going to get a fair hearing'. And it just degenerated after that.

They accused me of not getting on with staff, with pupils, with parents, with anyone that I came into contact with, basically. They said that my methods with the children were confrontational, the children did not get on with me, the way that I worked was awful, basically, that I had no sort of method for how I taught. I said that is not possible. I said that I've got the biggest A level group out of all the subjects, and I always have had. I've always had the best A level and GCSE results out of every subject. Last year I had 21 kids in the group and 19 got As and 2 got Bs, the year before it was roughly the same. There was nothing they could reproach me for. When I did the sums for it, I'd been there for 13 years and out of those 13 years I'd only ever had 12 children who had failed anything at all whether it was CSE, O level, A level, out of all the children I had taught. ... I kept pressing them, saying, 'What is the complaint?', and they said, 'We're not going to tell you, because you're so vindictive that if we tell you who the complaint is from, then you're going to pick on that child'. I said, 'I've never heard anything so ridiculous, how do you expect me to answer any complaint properly if you don't tell me who it's from?'. They just continued along those lines for an hour and three quarters. And I knew that I wasn't getting anywhere at all. At one point the chairman of the governors actually shut her eyes and looked like she was dozing off. They were both obviously totally uninterested in what I was saying, it was just putting me through hoops. They said that they would review the matter at the end of term, they weren't really happy with what I had said, but would review it. I wasn't really sure what they were reviewing, because they hadn't actually told me.

The headteacher's complaints at this meeting are well chosen to facilitate the aim of setting Gill up for dismissal. School teachers are *required* to have good organisational, communication and interpersonal skills in order to be viewed as competent professionals.

The type of allegations Gill encountered, then, position her as an incompetent teacher who could be dismissed for reasons of 'capability' (s 57 (4) (a) Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978). Gill's defence of her teaching performance cannot dislodge the allegations made against her - even though she draws on the verifiable evidence of examination results - because the headteacher and governors are not interested in her version of events. Furthermore, through not accepting the accusations made against her, Gill again rejects the authority of the headteacher. This reinforces the headteacher's initial perception of Gill as a teacher who refuses to accept her authority.

Gill decided at this point to look for alternative employment. Throughout the campaign of workplace bullying, however, Gill was unable to secure a new teaching post. She strongly suspected that the headteacher had written her a poor reference. This, then, offers a further reason to view Gill's experience as a vendetta perpetrated by a line manager who wants to dismiss an employee rather than encourage her to resign. For an alternative route - writing a good reference so that the employee who is no longer required is appointed to a new position in another school - is not taken.

After this first disciplinary meeting, Gill was deluged with letters requiring her to attend disciplinary meetings. Meetings were frequently called without 24 hours notice. Therefore her trade union representative advised her to refuse to attend. Finally, at a meeting which was called with 24 hours notice, Gill was told not to tell children off in front of other children, and not to comment on children's predicted exam grades. Gill found this

unbelievable - particularly as at an independent school parents pay for good exam results. It caused her to 'walk on eggshells' with the children. Rather than 'insisting' that they did their homework, she had to 'recommend' that they did so. Following the meeting, her trade union representative told Gill that she did not have anything to worry about, because the complaints against her were 'so flimsy they wouldn't stand up in any situation'. The trade union representative's verdict on this meeting begins to demonstrate the naiveté which can be exhibited by trade union representatives dealing with this newly labelled form of workplace harassment. His comments imply that he thinks that the complaints have to 'stand up' in order to be a serious threat to Gill's position in the school.

The stress of her situation meant that Gill was ill towards the end of term. She had to take a week off. When the end of term arrived, Gill expected to be summoned to a meeting to 'review the matter'. However, she had to wait a further ten days before a letter appeared in her pigeonhole. Again, 24 hours notice was not given. Her trade union representative advised her to refuse to attend. This cycle of events took place on a further three occasions during the holidays. A meeting was arranged for the first day of term. By this time complaints had arisen about work which Gill had been unable to return to children because of her illness at the end of term. This shows, then, how pressurising an employee so much that they become ill and subsequently perform their jobs less competently, acts in bullying line managers' interests (though this is not to suggest that the line manager seeks to *make* the employee ill). For when the employee performs less competently because of illness, the bullying line manager then has real proof - to add to fabrications - that the

employee is not a competent worker. At the meeting which was finally arranged with 24 hours notice, Gill found out that one complaint was from the parents of the girl who had been disruptive on the sixth form water-sports trip and the other complaint was from the parents of the child who was not doing any work for her A levels. She observed that the fathers of both of these girls had been chairmen of the Parent Teacher Association, and knew the headteacher socially. This, then, offers one reason why the headteacher took the two complaints so seriously. Gill explained that at the meeting she refuted all the charges which had been made against her:

When we came out the trade union representative said, 'That was absolutely magnificent, they know exactly what you've done for the school, how good you are, what the position is'. He said that obviously what they've done is that they've set too much store by two individuals who were proved to be very untrustworthy.

This 'magnificent' performance, however, can be viewed as the decisive moment in Gill's experience of workplace bullying, after which her departure became inevitable. Gill realised this herself. She explained that for an hour or so after the meeting she had felt happy. Then she thought back to the first disciplinary meeting and remembered how vindictive the headteacher had been. She realised the workplace bullying would not end because she had refuted the charges against her. From the headteacher's perspective, now that Gill has been informed who complained about her and has answered these complaints, she can no longer continue with the same strategy of calling meetings to discuss unclear accusations. The headteacher, therefore, has to progress to a new strategy. This is not to

suggest, though, that she is alone in wanting to continue the campaign against Gill or that she wants to do this entirely from personal vindictiveness. One reason why the headteacher has been appointed by the governors is in order to take parent complaint seriously. She has to prove that she is capable of doing this. Otherwise, she may be dismissed. As Gouldner (1954:72) points out, the new manager is informed of the shortcomings of his/her predecessor. This makes the new manager aware that, '[He/she] could disregard top management's rational values only at [his/her] peril'. This suggests, then, that the headteacher could also be seen as a victim of a form of workplace bullying. After the meeting at which she refuted the charges against her, the school secretary informed Gill that the head wanted to see her at 3.15pm in her room. At this meeting it was clear that the headteacher either saw the previous disciplinary meeting differently from Gill and her trade union representative or decided to re-interpret this meeting:

I went straight up at 3.15 and I walked in and I knew it was bad because the bursar was there, the head and the deputy head. And the head said, 'Now because the meeting on Wednesday went so badly...', and I said, 'If this is going to be a disciplinary meeting, I've been advised not to stay'. She said, 'I must tell you that we are terminating your contract with immediate effect and you are to leave the premises by 10 to 4'. I said, 'I'm not listening, I'm not staying', and she said, 'Well you'll get a letter before the end of the afternoon'. They had actually put a minder on me to escort me off the premises. They didn't even let me get my personal things.

Gill's refutation of the allegations against her was, therefore, irrelevant. This indicates that the workplace bullying Gill encountered should be understood as a campaign intended to result in her departure from the school. The two schoolchildren's allegations were simply a convenient means of achieving this dénouement. Following her dismissal, Gill prepared to take her case to an industrial tribunal in order to claim unfair dismissal:

The union launched the papers for the tribunal. It dragged on. The school kept putting off the date and trying to crack me up - which admittedly they almost did. Then I went to see the barrister. He said that I had a very good case. He said that the problem is, though, if they want to get rid of you they'll find anything and the actual weakest point of my argument was the fact that this sixth former had complained that I hadn't spent enough time on a particular topic. I said, 'You must be joking, I've been teaching for 20 years and you are telling me that an 18 year old can actually tell me that I haven't taught something properly in her opinion?' The barrister said, 'Yes, I'm afraid so'. I said, 'Well, what about my exam results?' He said that actually that's the sort of thing the tribunal would flick through in their lunchbreak, it's not actually relevant to your case. I thought well, what is the point of league tables and trying to get good results, because actually that was proof that I was a good teacher and I still am. But he said, 'Anyway, you've got a good case. If they offer you £5,000 or £6,000 then I would take it to save you going to a tribunal'. Then the next day they offered £7,000. The solicitor had never had a claim that was as high as that. So I settled straightaway.

This settlement should have signalled the conclusion of Gill's experiences of workplace bullying. The headteacher, however, continued to bully her. One form this workplace bullying took was directly preventing Gill from securing a new position:

There was one job that I applied for where it was sort of one period on a Friday lunchtime, in every single day, some at 9 in the morning with the next lesson at 3 in the afternoon and it was .2 of the timetable. I thought I'd apply for it, and I got a very strange response from the school. The school secretary actually put the phone down on me. I said, 'I'm just phoning about my application', and she said, 'What's your name?', and I told her, and I said, 'I wondered whether I was going to be called for interview because I'm going away on holiday'. She said, 'No you haven't got the job', and put the phone down. And that happened on 2 occasions with 2 different schools, so it really made me think what on earth is she saying to elicit this response? ... What I've actually been doing, and I was doing it for 2 years before I got the sack, was that I was retraining to be a counsellor, so luckily I've got something else that I'm going into. But the amount of harassment that I've actually had since I've left, as far as job applications are concerned, if I was still wanting to stay in full-time teaching I think it would have pushed me over the edge, because it was so frustrating that I wasn't even getting interviews.

A second form the headteacher's bullying took was blaming Gill for a range of incidents which took place after she left the school:

I got a phone call from a former colleague. She said, 'Can you tell me where all of the fifth year chemistry books are?' I said, 'I left about 6 weeks ago, I haven't got a clue! Normally they are on the top shelf in the stock cupboard'. She said, 'They're not there. You can tell me if you know where they are'. I said, 'I wouldn't touch them with a bargepole, I don't want those books (laughs), I've never taught from them, it's not interesting to me'. She said, 'Right, that's all I wanted to know, I'm sorry to push you, but we've had a little incident today and you're being accused of having stolen the resources from the science department'. And I said, 'I've never heard such crap in my whole life'. She said, 'Don't worry about it, I'll go all over the school and find out what's going on'. So luckily I had 4 or 5 very good friends left and they hunted all over the school in the most unlikely places for this material which they had very ostentatiously dropped hints that I had stolen, they had even done it to the extent that they had cancelled exams, saying that the exams couldn't take place because the materials were missing since I had left. They actually told the kids this. So it was sort of all being disseminated through lots of people so that people could draw their conclusions. And eventually someone else tracked down another box of books the deputy head's room, and this box was hidden under the desk. ... I found out that when they did this year's exams, the papers went missing in the post, and someone said in passing 'What is Gill doing now?' and a friend of mine said, 'She's doing exam marking', and immediately the exam secretary said, 'Well perhaps that's what's happened to the papers, she must have got hold of them'.

These examples of vindictiveness might indicate that the headteacher is seeking to justify Gill's dismissal - perhaps even to herself, given that in the disciplinary meetings she may have been forced to act as the puppet of the governors.

A third form of workplace bullying involved bullying people who had been Gill's friends while she had been employed at the school:

It was my birthday and I had invited all the people who had been very supportive out for a meal. Before the meal various people were approached and they were told by the deputy head and the head, 'You do still want a job at this school, don't you? Well, I would think very seriously about whether you are going to go to Gill's meal, because we need to know which side of the fence you are actually on'. Well all the people did actually still go to the meal, but then months later they were still trying to find out the name of the thirteenth person who had gone to the meal.

Gill's account, then, reveals a vindictive campaign of workplace bullying. Such experiences are not, however, unusual. The account of the second professional employee bullied by a new broom line manager - David, the design engineer - also illustrates a similarly vindictive campaign designed to set the employee up as a poor worker so that he could be dismissed:

I did a job and we went through all the drawings and the line manager couldn't find anything wrong with it. But in the title I had missed out a full stop, and I actually got told off for missing the full stop out. I got a right barracking over that. The very same day one of the other men in the office produced a drawing and there were 15 errors on that drawing, and he signed that and it went out. There were several ideas over the years that I

had put forward, which were incorporated by [the bullying line manager] and given to other people to do. For example, I made a suggestion. He said it couldn't be done. Yet some 12 months later - and in the meantime all my stuff on it had disappeared - one of his friends in the office all of a sudden appeared with all these documents on his desk and was designing from my sketches.

David is an experienced design engineer. Smith (1987:236-7) reports that technical staff who have got beyond their apprenticeship and have been working in an area for a number of years question the role of supervisors/section leaders because only inexperienced design engineers need to have their work checked for mistakes. Therefore, this line manager's tactic of looking for and finding (trivial) mistakes in the work of an experienced design engineer is significant. As David is not inexperienced, this constructs him as incompetent. The ambiguous status of the line manager in design engineering is, however, also apparent here. As mentioned above, line managers are held in low esteem by design engineers because they do not exercise technical knowledge in their daily dealings with their staff. David's line manager is, then, perhaps seeking to position himself as a competent technical worker rather than a clerical/administrative employee through the tactic of controlling the output of an experienced technical worker. The theft of David's design ideas is also an important bullying tactic. A design engineer has to have ideas in order to be perceived as a competent worker. David is prevented from demonstrating this capability.

The process of finding fault with David's work and removing his responsibilities continued for seven years before David was finally dismissed from the organisation. He was,

therefore, being very effectively set up for fair dismissal on the grounds of ‘capability’ assessed by reference to ‘skill’ (s 57(4)(a) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978). The series of incidents David encountered could have prompted him to resign and claim unfair constructive dismissal. When an employee is bullied or harassed by his/her employer, this is likely to amount to a breach of the implied contractual duty to maintain trust and confidence. The law has established that individual actions taken by an employer which do not themselves constitute fundamental breaches of any contractual term may have the cumulative effect of undermining trust and confidence, thereby entitling the employee to resign and claim constructive dismissal (IDS, 1996:76.2 & 76.2.1). When David sought advice from his trade union representative, however, he was told that his experiences would be regarded as ‘a manager’s right to discuss change, or to tell you off over a minor thing if he saw fit to do so’. The trade union representative suggested that David should write down every incident that happened to him. He did so for seven years, but did not want to leave his job. He both enjoyed his work and had financial commitments to consider. It would appear from the *sequence of events he described, that* as David did not leave of his own accord, his dismissal became inevitable. A decisive moment, however, lent urgency to David’s dismissal. Two young male design engineers frequently showed ageist hostility towards David, referring to him as ‘the old man in the corner’ who ought to retire. One day, David was sitting at his desk:

I looked up to see BK [a young, male design engineer] standing by the door to my office. He had a shotgun pointed at me. He said, ‘This is what I’d like to do’. I was horrified and said, ‘You have just committed a crime by pointing that at me’. He just laughed and

lowered the gun (it was not loaded). DE [another male design engineer] then came in and entered into discussion about what I had said and was abusive ... I went to see KT [the bullying line manager]. He was not in, so I went to the company secretary. I asked her to talk to BK quietly and not to take it too far, as he was a young lad starting his career, which could be seriously damaged. I asked her not to tell KT. She did tell KT. He said I had gone out of procedure, that I should not have told anyone outside the office (in other words, cover it up). Because the initial agreement with the company secretary had been broken and because I had received a rebuke for reporting it, I reported it to my union. At their suggestion, I also rang the local police station. They told me it was very serious. I decided not to press charges, and the police said that they would enter it in their book. It could be that they contacted my employer about it and that it was then decided to get rid of me.

The key problem here is David's outrage when the company secretary acts against his wishes by telling the bullying line manager about the shotgun incident and he is reprimanded by the bullying line manager for reporting the incident to the company secretary. This outrage leads him to act against the instructions of the bullying line manager and report the incident to his trade union and the police. *His action at this point is perhaps understandable, but extremely risky.* For if it became known that an employee had threatened a colleague with a gun, the company's gun licence would have been withdrawn and the business would have been seriously affected. The young design engineer who pointed the gun would have faced criminal charges. He was a favourite of the line manager. David's dismissal followed soon afterwards:

The line manager said, 'As you know, you are employed as a design engineer and for the last 12 months I have not used you in that capacity because I don't think you're up to the job. Therefore, I am going to dismiss you on the grounds of incompetence. I want you to collect your things and leave the site'. I replied, 'No, I will not leave until I have had a word with my union rep, as I object to this'. I began to walk away and he followed me saying, 'Get off the site. This company does not recognise unions anyway. Don't telephone from here, telephone from home'. ... I asked the lads in the shop if I could get any support from them, but their rep said it would depend upon their senior rep at the parent company. I contacted him, but his excuse was that it was a different company and it couldn't be done. ... I went to see the Trades Union Council. He could not believe it. They had flouted the contract rules by not giving warnings. ... I was informed that KT had assembled all the staff at my company and had told them that I had not been sacked, but suspended. (Extract from diary) Obviously this is an attempt to get round the problem of non-compliance with the contract after they received my appeal letter. I do not accept this change of position. (A day later/extract from diary) I have not received any mail informing me of a change of position to suspension, so as far as I am concerned it is still dismissal ... They gave an outline of why they sacked me, which was so flimsy it was untrue. They said I couldn't do the job. I'd been doing the job for 10 years and it had taken them 10 years to decide that I couldn't do the job. In my opinion, he engineered it over the years, by excluding me from work, denigrating the job I had done, getting me to do stuff that you would get an office boy to do.

David's account highlights how derecognition of trade unions functions to isolate an employee who experiences a problem at work. Earlier, David had commented that because all the men who worked in the main factory were in the trade union, if any of them had a problem the company would have had a hundred men walking out. David cannot have recourse to collective action because he is the only trade union member in his part of the company. At the time of the interview he was unemployed:

They've admitted the shotgun incident happened now. They want me to accept the money they've thrown on the table, which is a minor sum, because otherwise their firearms licence could be withdrawn. I'm just an ordinary bloke with kids to look after. You're on the treadmill of having a mortgage, so you haven't a cat in hell's chance of surviving.

This section shows that the two professional employees bullied by new brooms encountered campaigns of workplace bullying designed to set them up for dismissal, rather than resignation or redundancy.

Forced to leave

In contrast with Gill and David, Hannah - a subordinate employee bullied by a new broom - encountered a campaign of workplace bullying which was designed to undermine her job satisfaction so that she would resign from her position as nursery nurse:

One morning at 8.30 the early years co-ordinator came into the room and said, 'I want to see you *now*'. She said that in future I would be preparing for 3 other teachers' classes, and would do everything that the teachers told me to do for other classes. I would have to clear up after other classes. I said I wasn't employed to do that, I was employed in the nursery. She said, 'You *will* do as you are told'. She said, 'You won't ask the teacher for jobs, they will leave you notes'. ... I was told that taking an hour for lunch could lead to dismissal. I take the same time as the teacher. She said, 'You are *entitled* to 45 minutes'. I said, 'I arrive early. I'm on the premises if anything happens'. She said, 'I'm not happy with this, I don't want you in school until 8.30, if you are in early you will be disciplined'.

A significant part of Hannah's job satisfaction is, therefore, gained from an appearance of parity with the nursery teacher, e.g. lunch hour entitlement. Hannah borrows authority from this, e.g. she arrives early in case 'anything happens'. Hannah's role is being downgraded/appropriately graded in order to make her want to leave. The co-ordinator is not yet setting her up for the sack, although the threat of this is being made. While this is evidence of personal vindictiveness, an increase in bureaucratisation is often part of a leadership succession. Gouldner (1954:69) reports that formal rules which had previously been ignored are revived following a leadership succession.

The co-ordinator's actions clearly show that she did not want Hannah in the school. She wanted her to resign of her own accord. Hannah's departure by dismissal, however, starts to become much more likely when Hannah begins to complain about the treatment she is encountering:

I was very upset about how I was being spoken to. Even though I was older than her, I respected that she was senior to me but that doesn't mean that I should be spoken to in that way. So I sought advice from my union. I wrote out a letter setting out what had happened. It came across that perhaps I was being over-sensitive, perhaps there was a 'personality clash' there. The union sought an informal meeting to discuss with the head teacher, personnel and the trade union representative what they wanted from me and why there had been changes in my job description without notification. Personnel said that perhaps it was a 'personality clash' and they would monitor it.

The problem, therefore, is characterised as a 'personality clash' rather than 'workplace bullying'. This currently means the problem is not understood as a legitimate grievance - it is a 'personal' disagreement which should be dealt with by the two individuals concerned, rather than a 'professional' disagreement which merits trade union and personnel department involvement. Hannah's first complaint is, therefore, ineffective. By making this complaint, however, Hannah begins to acquire a reputation for complaining. Next, Hannah had an experience which caused her to resort to the school's grievance procedure:

This Friday afternoon, the children went out to play and I was left in to tidy the nursery. I went to the home corner and found that somebody had tipped milk among the toys, and it was running all over the floor. I started to clear it. The co-ordinator came back in and I said, 'Someone's thrown milk in among the toys and I'm cleaning it up'. She said, 'Take the children's coats off'. I said, 'I'm just cleaning the milk away'. She said, 'Do it and do

it now'. I had just had enough. I said, 'If I move from here now, this'll get back to the head'. She sent a child to get an older child and sent her for the head. She wasn't in. On Monday at 8.30 the co-ordinator wanted an assurance that it wouldn't happen again. She said, 'You will not answer back again, or I will have you removed from this nursery'. ... I took a grievance out. What the head didn't realise that she had to go to the grievance to say what she'd done to solve the problem seeing as I had been asking for help from October, and that was February. She had been spoken to by personnel and she was telling personnel that everything was fine because she was only asking the co-ordinator and not me. She got the letter to say that she had to go to the grievance. She went home sick and she never came back. She retired. The outcome was that I must obey 'any reasonable order' - but whose 'reasonable'? A suggestion was made that we must have meetings. We must have a meeting with the person on job share. Also that I must be listened to. Good things. And then nothing happened. The person on job share started. I was not introduced to the job sharer. When it came to trips, even though I was only working half a day I would have gone but I was not asked. I was told, 'We are going out next week. You will go in the reception class instead'. I asked her why and she said, 'It might be too much for you'. She said she hadn't arranged it, someone else had. I asked the reception teacher about it, and she had been told that I had been asked and didn't want to go. I was left clearing duties. I went and hid in the toilets while they went out. Various parents asked why I was not going.

The second complaint, then, is almost as ineffective as the first. It does, however, cement Hannah's reputation as a nursery nurse who complains. She is also positioned as a nursery nurse who will not accept the authority of her superiors. Hannah's insistence that she

would clean up the spilt milk before taking the children's coats off could constitute grounds for fair dismissal for the reason of her 'conduct', her 'refusal to obey an order' (s 57(2)(b) of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978). Once Hannah has been characterised as an insubordinate complainer, her situation worsens. When the situation escalates still further, the new headteacher draws on these prior incidents. Hannah finds that she can either leave of her own accord or be dismissed:

The new head started in January and in the first week she interviewed everyone. She asked what the problem was. She said she was sympathetic, she seemed very supportive. But, she was one of these people who have a terrific temper. You could hear her shouting at the other end of the school. There was a meeting in the staffroom. She came in absolutely blazing. She said, 'There's an atmosphere in this school, a lot of people notice it, people know who they are, I can't make you get on, but you will either get on or get out. The job bulletin's there, so I suggest you look at it and get out'. Well, we didn't know who she was getting at. ... That week, on the Monday and Tuesday I was alone in dinners. On the Wednesday I went to the head and said, 'Is this supposed to be a two-way thing, this change, this trying to be better, is it meant for both of us, or just me?'. She said, 'No, it's for both, why?'. I said, 'I've been excluded from a trip, and I'm left on my own at lunchtimes, and still not being told about things'. She said that she's obviously not taking it seriously, and on the Friday she assured me that she had been told. The following week on Tuesday nothing had changed. I was so angry that I just went to the head's office and said, 'What is going on?'. She said, 'What do you mean?'. I said, 'I'm sorry, but I'm still on my own. Nothing's changed'. ... At 8.30 the next day I went in to the head and said, 'I'm very, very, sorry that I shouted yesterday, but I was annoyed'. She said, 'I was

annoyed. I tried ringing you at home, and if I had got you you would have been sorry'. She closed the door and said, 'Right. I'm sick and tired of hearing you moan. The co-ordinator says you won't even try. You never moved from one area yesterday'. I said, 'I was in the large, wet play area, where there's a rocking horse, wash basins and a large activities table. I was supervising that all morning, the co-ordinator was at the other end and then I was in at least three places'. She said, 'One of you is lying'. She said 'You're not wanted here. Get out. Go and get yourself a job. Nobody here wants to work with you'. I said 'I'll go home' and she said, 'If you go home I'll have you disciplined'. I said, 'What if I go on the sick?'. She said, 'I'll have you dismissed. We'll go through your job description and look for anything that you're not doing and you'll be disciplined and dismissed'. I said, 'Hang on a minute. I've been complaining for 18 months that I've not been *allowed* to work properly. I've been given no direction at all, I've just been totally ignored. So how can you say that you'll have me disciplined for not doing anything when I've been complaining about it all?'. She said, 'You haven't carried out the recommendations that the deputy head put forward'. I said, 'That's another thing, none of the recommendations were carried out'.

From this account of the headteacher's comments it appears that she is admitting that, rather than already having good grounds for dismissing Hannah, she will find reasons to dismiss her. Though the headteacher began by saying that either the co-ordinator or Hannah must be lying, she immediately decided to side with the more senior of the two employees. This begins to highlight the hopeless position of subordinate employees who encounter workplace bullying. Their managers will not side with them because of their subordinate positions in their organisations.

Hannah considered what to do next. Her trade union representative pressured her not to go to an industrial tribunal because it would be very stressful and because the school would 'lie blatantly' about what had happened. As a result of trade union pressure, Hannah finally agreed to take early retirement:

I feel disgusted with myself for having done it that way. ... It's not gone away, and it's been over a year. I can't go to the town where the school is now. I went there, and I got out of the car and I couldn't go any further. I have nightmares. It's still going on. I've not been in work for over a year now. I couldn't go to work now. I can't go out some days. People are surprised because I am a strong person. My pension is just under what I earned on job share. I had hoped for a secure way of life.

Hannah's experience, then, culminated in the way desired by the early years co-ordinator: Hannah was removed from the school with minimum disruption. This intention to remove an employee with minimum disruption appeared to be shared by Sarah's new line manager.

As Sarah and the new architect became acquainted with one another, Sarah began to feel that the architect's desire to replace the existing staff with employees of his own choice was not the only reason he wanted her to resign from the company. Sarah and the architect developed a 'personality clash'. Sarah explained why she felt that the architect did not like her and why she did not like the new architect:

I think he was jealous of me, people have said that. People always say that I'm a people-person, and I am, I like meeting different people, and because I was very popular with everyone in the firm I don't think he could hack it, because he wasn't that popular. ... I suppose what made it worse was that the boss before, he was the most lovely man. He was a gentleman. He was sweet. ... [The new architect] never showed anything of himself. All the bosses that I've ever worked for, I'm on good terms with all of them. The previous boss, for instance, I know his wife, I know his kids. To be a good secretary you have to get to know the person, but you never got to know him. I knew he was married, I knew he had kids, end of story. He didn't want me or anybody else to know anything else about him as a person.

Sarah, therefore, saw herself as a 'people person'. This is consistent with her desire to know the new architect as a 'person' as well as a 'line manager'. Sarah's expectation that she should know him as a person was fuelled by the informal, almost familial, boss/secretary relationship (as described by Pringle, 1989:32), which she had enjoyed with her previous line manager. The unequal power relations between boss and secretary had not been instantly visible to Sarah in this particular relationship because she had known the line manager's wife and children. The new architect had previously worked in a much larger organisation. He was, therefore, accustomed to much more formal, impersonal boss/secretary relationship. Pringle (1989:37) reports that male bosses often try to control female secretaries by knowing the details of their personal lives. The new architect may have felt that discussing his personal life with his secretary would give her control over

him. He was, of course, perfectly within his rights to restrict the boss/secretary interaction to discussion of work tasks.

In common with Hannah, Sarah perceived that the architect wanted her to seek alternative employment. She explained the tactics her line manager employed:

He was just like a spoiled, petulant boy if he couldn't get his own way. He'd have temper tantrums, swear, slam the door, slam the phone down, you name it. Then he would take it out on me and Lucy in whatever ways he could ... He would say some awful things to me, make out I'm the world's worst, criticise my work, everything, and really it was mental torture the whole time, wondering what he was going to say next.

Sarah felt that the line manager attempted to destroy her confidence in her capability as a worker so that she would leave. Sarah's confidence was affected by the architect's behaviour, but she had no intention of leaving until she had found another job. On one occasion, Sarah was called for a second interview for a new job. The interviewer commented that she seemed particularly nervous. Sarah explained that she had been having problems with her boss and was concerned that he may have written a poor reference. The interviewer replied that the architect had written her an extremely glowing reference. Therefore, in contrast to Gill who was unable to find a new job because her references were poor, at the time when Sarah was still employed by the architect - if she had been successful in interviews elsewhere - her existing line manager's written reference would not have prevented her from securing a new position. This may indicate that the

architect was especially keen to help Sarah leave the organisation - by any possible means. His criticisms of her work were not necessarily part of a process to set her up for dismissal, unless she failed to leave of her own accord. However, Sarah was unsuccessful in finding a new job. The urgency with which the architect then sought Sarah's resignation or dismissal was then influenced by three decisive moments. Firstly, like Hannah, Sarah eventually complained about the treatment she had encountered:

In September I had to go to my trade union - Lucy and I were both in a trade union, but we wouldn't take that final step - I went first and Lucy followed, and we put a grievance complaint in. It became official then. The firm really did let us down. They actually called him in to the human resources department and they did give him a severe telling off and made him meet us, discuss the problem (with our union rep present) and made us ... well, asked us if they monitored the situation carefully, would we drop the grievance and see how he went? We said yes - we didn't want any hassle. In actual fact the human resources department were lacking, have been lacking throughout, because once we'd done that they just sort of quietly forgot about us. For a little while the situation was OK because he was on his best behaviour, and then after a while he started again.

This experience, when viewed alongside the ineffectiveness of Hannah's informal complaint, underlines the often hopeless nature of subordinate employees' complaints to their personnel departments. In both cases the personnel/human resources departments were more keen to ensure that the grievances would be dropped than they were concerned to address the problems which had precipitated the grievances.

Sarah's next decisive moment occurred when she expressed a personal opinion about the architect's managerial skills. As outlined earlier - through discussion of Gill's rejection of the headteacher's authority - this is an extremely dangerous act. In this case, it is even more dangerous, as Sarah made her comments directly to the architect:

Lucy and I were the only two people still working on Christmas Eve, he had us working till half past 5 and *everybody* else had gone at 3. We had the most miserable Christmas. I lost my temper. I told him, 'It takes a certain amount of skill to be a good manager, and you haven't got any skills at managing people' and that was probably my downfall, because he then got the bit between his teeth, after Christmas the bullying got worse and worse.

It seems clear from her account that as Sarah had failed to leave of her own accord, these instances prompted the architect to initiate *new tactics to ensure her departure from the company* against her will. He decided to make her redundant. This illustrates the progression which can occur in experiences of campaigns of workplace bullying. When one strategy - making work unpleasant so that the employee resigns - fails to have the desired result - a new strategy is employed, the aim of which is to make the employee's forcible removal incontestable:

Somebody gave him permission to take on an Office Administrator, and he took this woman on. There were three clerical staff then, instead of two and he put her above me,

even though as Senior Secretary nobody's supposed to be above me, and she came down on me really hard and it was sheer hell. After the Office Administrator was appointed, the human resources department then said that we were overstaffed and would have to lose one person. I said, 'Well, we all know who that will be, because he's wanted me out since day one'. He put a report in to human resources saying that it was me that should be made redundant, and my argument is that if it's him that's the problem why do they take his word and nobody else's? I was made redundant after 7 years' service and the Office Administrator had been there 3 months.

Sarah's question was answered at the internal hearing she attended to appeal against her redundancy. The human resources director said, 'We appointed the *new architect to run* the department, and we must stand by his decision'. Sarah lost the appeal. This underlines the often hopeless position of subordinate employees who complain of workplace bullying through internal grievance procedures. Sarah's failure to win the appeal also illustrates the efficacy of the tactics the new architect employed. Although her professional incompetence was part of the argument against retaining Sarah at the expense of the Office Administrator, it was not the only argument. The architect did not have to prove that Sarah was a poor worker in order to argue that she should be made redundant. Instead, he simply had to react to the human resources department's decision that the department was overstaffed. Though she lost the appeal, Sarah was very pleased with her performance at the hearing:

The new architect actually said that I was unintelligent, and couldn't possibly talk to anybody who was not on my level. I talk to high up people all over the world. I've never had any problems speaking to anybody. I disproved all this at the hearing, because I was brilliant that day. I was angry, but I didn't lose my temper. I was eloquent. I could see that the human resources director was sympathetic.

When Sarah and the architect returned to their offices after this meeting, the architect demanded that Sarah clear her desk immediately - even though she still had to work out her notice. The architect's fury at this point can be interpreted in the same way as Gill's headteacher's reaction after Gill refuted the allegations made against her. When the employee proves that the accusations against them are untrue, their accusers find this extremely difficult to accept. Sarah refused to leave, as this would have meant losing her redundancy payment. While she was working out her notice, Sarah had a visit from the human resources director:

I had asked if I could buy the PC. They said they would throw that in for free with £2,000. I said, 'What do I have to do to get this 2 thousand pounds and PC?'. 'Just sign this little disclaimer to say that you won't take this any further'. I said, 'I've had two years of hell with this man and you think you're going to pay me off with £2,000?'. If I lose at the industrial tribunal, I do not care. This is not about money, it is about fairness. Let's see the name of this really prestigious firm plastered all over the papers. I think they'll make a financial settlement before it gets to the tribunal. It'll get reported if I get to tribunal. I'm going to take advice on it. I've got a family to think about. They've got to make it really

worth my while to drop the case. It's not about money, but at the end of the day I'd be stupid to spite myself and my family - I might be out of work for some time. I'm going to need that money. Lucy is going to act as a witness for me. There's quite a few people that can act as witnesses.

Sarah did not receive a settlement. Instead, the case progressed to an industrial tribunal, which Sarah lost. This took place several months after I conducted the interview with her. Therefore, I am not able to report how she came to lose the tribunal. Tribunals focus on whether or not the grievance procedure has been strictly followed, rather than on the outcome of the grievance procedure. As such, Sarah may have been mistaken in believing that having people to act as witnesses for her would have a significant bearing on the outcome of the industrial tribunal.

Deciding to leave

As Angela, the personnel manager, and Dennis, the shopfloor worker, were bullied by despotic managing directors, their accounts are less structured in terms of escalating trouble. They both realised that once they had been singled out as workplace bullying victims, they had no option but to leave, be dismissed or - perhaps, in Dennis's case - to stay and continue to be bullied. Angela explained how her boss operated after he had decided to sack someone. Her account illustrates how co-workers - while they might often be informally supportive towards workplace bullying victims - can refuse to support a workplace bullying victim in order to keep in favour with a managing director in an

organisational context of intimidation and fear. This can be interpreted as a form of 'mobbing':

The Managing Director was manipulative. He would set one person up against another. He would make sure that people did not have the information they needed to do their job. He would freeze them out, he would isolate them. You have no friends when you are being victimised. No-one will stand by you. He'd come out and say quite openly that you weren't of any value to the organisation, you weren't valued by your colleagues. If I thought that he was the problem, I was wrong, because it wasn't just him it was everybody else that felt you were a waste of space. You couldn't challenge him because he just had this habit of turning everything on its head, 'It's not my problem, it's yours, you're the one that's incapable'. It wasn't just me. He'd just sit there and say anybody could do what you are doing. The whole approach was to gradually wear you down, and through that he broke your confidence, he broke your spirit, so that in the end most employees were sacked quite legitimately because they couldn't do their job properly. They were so busy watching over their shoulder for the next trick. He'd set you up. You'd get a telephone call in your office and he'd say, 'Can you come down', and you'd find that all the other heads of department had had a meeting to set you up.

Angela's account suggests that employees at this firm can either secure alternative employment or wait to be sacked once they have fallen out of favour with the managing director. He does not really care how employees leave, as long as they leave. The Managing Director's form of despotism, therefore, differs from the tactics of the new broom line managers discussed above. For while new broom line managers had to prove

the unwanted employee's incompetence, established despots simply decree that the employee is incompetent and sack them:

If I'd have said I'm leaving and going to claim constructive dismissal, victimisation and harassment, the first thing he'd do is say, 'Where are you going to get your proof?' And to me that is always going to be the greatest problem. ... You're just not going to get people who are dependent on an organisation to give evidence against an employer that they are then going to face the next day. Because those people [managing directors] aren't going to leave. When they're employed at that level, and they own the bloody company or at least run it, they aren't leaving, where are they going to go? They're in a nice situation, earning £70,000 a year. The only people that are going to leave in an organisation like that are the victims.

This despot, in contrast with the new brooms discussed above, operates in a non-unionised workplace. Though the accounts of the unionised workers indicate the relative ineffectivity of trade union representation, at least such workers do have someone to whom to turn for advice and assistance. Angela and her co-workers do not have this option. Angela decided not to wait to be sacked. She found a new job in a different organisation. In common with the other workers discussed in this chapter, leaving the workplace bullying situation did not signal the end of the workplace bullying experience, however. Angela drew attention to the long-term psychological consequences of her experiences:

I tend to over-react now. Whenever I go into a stressful situation now I get the same pain. It's like my stomach is anticipating confrontation. Even though in 9 cases out of 10 that confrontation isn't there. I suppose it's the messages that go back to your brain.

While Gill and David's line managers were prepared to encounter disruption in the form of unfair dismissal cases, and Sarah and Hannah's line managers manoeuvred their departures with minimal disruption, Angela's managing director did not perceive the possibility of a constructive unfair dismissal case as disruptive. He merely wanted Angela to leave. He would gladly have paid the price of publicity, if she had taken a case to an industrial tribunal.

Dennis, in contrast, did not perceive that he would be sacked if he did not resign from his job. The tactics he encountered are not necessarily even about encouraging him to seek alternative employment. Instead, initially, he is being paid back for initiating a compensation claim. The workplace bullying tactics he encountered meant that he could not increase his pay:

I've been blamed for things I haven't done. We have a day shift and a night shift, one man will take over from another on the same machine. Work all goes into the same stillages and sometimes somebody will do scrap work. Instead of putting it separate, they'll slip it in to make their numbers up. This is only my word against theirs, but I don't do scrap and if I do, then I'll put it separately and tell them that I've done scrap. Yet it's always my fault. If you do scrap you have to do scrap labels and my name is always on them, even if I'm not

there. It goes against you when you have pay reviews. They bring up how much scrap you've done. I'm never on my machine, I'm always talking, and it's not true. I was off my machine one day, I had to be, I was on a job where jobs come off the machine and you have to take them to another machine and finish them by hand. And while I was off, the machine ran out of bar, so it stopped running. The two directors were watching me out of the window, and got the shopfloor manager to come and bawl me out. He asked me why the machine wasn't working, and I said, 'Well, the bar ran out'. Do I realise that this doesn't pay my wages. I said, 'I didn't realise that the bar had run out, I was finishing these jobs over there, and as soon as I came back I would have put a bar in'. 'Never leave this machine not running, this machine has got to run 24 hours a day, else you don't get paid'. I didn't agree, but I said, 'Fair enough'. On another occasion, they totally contradicted themselves, I had the machine running and I went off to do another job and I got ripped to pieces for leaving the machine while it was running, it could have smashed up, it could have gone wrong but I wasn't there to keep an eye on it. Which was totally opposite to what they told me in the first place. So I knew they were picking.

As these tactics continued, however, Dennis began to realise that it would be in his interests to leave the organisation:

I had a word with the person in charge of my section, and I said, 'I'm never going to get on here, am I?, the way he's treating me'. They pay you very poorly anyway, they work us to death, we're not allowed to talk, we have to eat our sandwiches on the machine while we're working, the idea is that you slowly work your way up, your wages get better, things get easier, as you work your way up. I said, 'I'm not going to be able to work my way up,

am I?' He said, 'I shouldn't tell you this, but he's told me that he doesn't want you here'. I said that I think the best thing for me to do is get another job. He said, 'I don't want you to leave, as far as I'm concerned you're a good worker, you're "dead on"', he said, 'You're "dead on", but I don't blame you if you do leave'.

Therefore, Dennis started looking for a new job:

The owner found out that I was looking for another job and he called me in and said, 'I don't want you to leave'. I said, 'I want you to get off my back and I want you to give me a pay rise'. He said, 'Don't get me wrong, I'm not giving you a pay rise, and I won't get off your back either, but I don't want you to leave'. ... I went for a job. The boss said, 'The job's yours, providing your bosses don't say anything too derogatory about you'. He said, 'I want you to think about it as well, and in three days time if I haven't phoned you, you phone me'. After 5 days when I realised he wasn't going to phone me, I phoned him and asked the secretary if I could speak to him. She came back and said, 'I've been told to tell you that you've been unsuccessful in the interview'. I tried to phone the chap 2 or 3 times and he wouldn't speak to me, so I went down there one evening and waited for him to come out. I said, 'Look, no hassles or anything, I just want to know, did you ask for a reference?' and he said, 'Yes'. I said, 'Was I put down?' and he said, 'Yes'. That's why I didn't get the job, but I can't prove it because he asked me to promise that I wouldn't go back and tell them.

This experience links with Gill's inability to secure a new position because of bad references to highlight the discriminatory nature of references, particularly telephone

references. This point has been illustrated by Collinson (1987:383) in a study of recruitment of women for temporary picking and packing jobs. He quotes a manager discussing how employers can warn each other about 'difficult staff': 'We can say things about staff on the phone that we wouldn't dare put down on paper'.

Dennis's bullying managing director's reported comment (above) that he did want Dennis to leave is, however, inconsistent with his insistence that he did not want Dennis to leave. This illustrates the complexity of workplace bullying. The owner was furious that Dennis had made a compensation claim. However, Dennis himself felt that the owner wanted him to stay at the firm because he was one of their best workers - he had an all round knowledge of the work processes and always hit his production targets. Thus, in contrast with Gill, whose headteacher provided her with poor references so that she could dismiss her from the school, Dennis's managing director writes poor references for him in order to trap Dennis in the organisation because he is a good worker.

Dennis eventually found a job in another factory whose managing director did not ask for references before formally offering him the job. Dennis remained extremely concerned, however, about the possible effect of his workplace bullying experience on his future employment:

I'm really worried about my new job, in case they've got in touch for references. They could also have the approach of watching me carefully, and that means that I can't put a foot wrong and I'm going to be judged wrongly. I don't like the thought. ... He's very

childish, I wouldn't doubt that he'd do something, so that he could say that he'd had the last laugh.

Thus, even though Dennis's account appeared to end much more positively than those of the other five informants, it is still possible that he may be dismissed from his new job on the basis of workplace bullying in his previous job.

Summary

This section has demonstrated that the six employees' experiences of workplace bullying escalated in a range of ways which are related to the type of bully the men and women encountered ('new broom' or 'established despot') and the victim's position in the organisational hierarchy (professional/managerial or subordinate). The professional employees bullied by new brooms - David and Gill - experienced serial allegations designed to prove their professional incompetence so that they could be dismissed from their jobs. The subordinate employees bullied by new brooms - Hannah and Sarah - encountered an erosion of job satisfaction designed to precipitate their resignations. After they failed to resign, they were set up for dismissal/redundancy. The professional employee bullied by a despot - Angela - did not need to have her incompetence proven. Her managing director routinely flouted employment law, and would have sacked her without evidence had she not resigned first. The subordinate employee bullied by an established despot - Dennis - had his job satisfaction eroded as a punishment for stepping out of his place in the organisational hierarchy. If he had not left the firm, the workplace

bullying may well have escalated into a campaign to set him up for dismissal or, instead, the workplace bullying may have continued without any intention to set Dennis up for dismissal.

The six accounts are similar in nature because they all contain decisive events after which the employee's departure became imminent. In each case this involves the men and women speaking about the problems they have encountered, either through informal complaint/discussion and/or formal grievance procedures. For David and Gill - the two professional employees bullied by new brooms - decisive events, rather than altering the character of the campaign, lend urgency to their line managers' project of dismissing them from the organisations. For Hannah and Sarah - the two subordinate employees bullied by new brooms - decisive events, alongside their failure to resign from their organisations, signal a shift in the tactics of the bully from encouragement to resign to setting them up for dismissal. For Angela and Dennis - the managerial and subordinate employees bullied by established despots - decisive events convince them that they must resign from their organisations either to avoid being sacked or to escape further workplace bullying. The commonality between all six accounts, therefore, is that all of the victims unwillingly left the organisation where they had encountered workplace bullying.

Organisational position and gendered workers

Up until now, this chapter has focused on the salience of organisational position to men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying. Workplace bullying research, drawing from traditional organisational theory, currently presents bullied men and women as primarily workers rather than gendered individuals: this emphasis has been reflected in my discussion so far. This might be taken to imply that I agree with previous commentators (e.g. Adams, 1992) that 'class' - rather than gender - is *the* structuring process of workplace bullying. I wish to emphasise, however, that this has been a deliberately selective focus, because my primary rationale has been to offer a deeper qualitative analysis of these features of the phenomenon now interpreted as 'workplace bullying', given the paucity of such analyses.

At this point, though, I wish to begin to problematise such a stance. As indicated in Chapter 1, my interpretation of workplace bullying differs from Adams (1992). Drawing from feminist theory rather than traditional organisational theory, my starting point is that all social interactions are gendered. Thus, I argue that workplace bullying is a gendered experience for both men and women. The gendering process may either be immediately apparent (this will be explored in Chapter 7) or less instantly visible because gender is already embedded in organisations. This second assertion will be discussed in this section. This does not mean, though, that class is unimportant to my analysis. Following Acker (1991:167), I argue that class is constructed through gender and class relations are always gendered.

Acker (1991:170), exploring the theory of gendered organisations, explains that in organisational logic, jobs have no occupants, no human bodies and no gender. An abstract job can exist, can be transformed into a concrete instance, only if there is a worker. In organisational logic, filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for the work. Such a hypothetical worker cannot have other imperatives of existence that impinge upon the job. There is no place within the disembodied job or the gender-neutral organisation for other 'bodied' processes, such as human reproduction or the free expression of emotions (Acker, 1991:173).

The subordinate employees discussed in this chapter were indeed initially perceived by their line managers merely as workers employed to perform particular jobs. The workplace bullying, however, escalated when their line managers became aware of the workers' personalities and professional competencies. The professional/managerial employees perhaps encountered workplace bullying because their personal lives intruded into their organisational lives: Angela had been ill, David got divorced and Gill had suffered a number of bereavements. All these 'illegitimate' intrusions constructed the men and women as unsuitable for their jobs. Thus, this chapter shows that line managers do often want disembodied workers who exist only for the work.

Yet while the evidence given above suggests that these workers' line managers wanted an impersonal bureaucracy, their relationship with their employees was, in fact, not impersonal but personal and thus gendered. A process of gendering which is particularly

apparent in Angela and Sarah's accounts is that men occupied more senior positions than women in organisational hierarchies and deployed their organisational power in a way which highlights male dominance of women. Angela commented that:

The company could only keep people who were very similar to the managing director. Very ambitious, a need to earn a lot of money and to achieve status, social and at work. Very important to join the right clubs. All the men were always talking about the clubs they belonged to and the schools their boys went to. The men that were there were yes men. If I had agreed with everything perhaps I would have got on better, but I couldn't do that. I wasn't comfortable with it.

Angela's experiences, then, are gendered as Angela cannot be similar to the managing director because she is not a man. Her inability to be a 'yes man' at work is made even more unacceptable because as a woman she is excluded from men's ways of socialising outside work (see Cockburn, 1991). Sarah's 'personality clash' with her new male line manager offers a further example of male harassment of women. Sarah felt that:

He treats women worse. He wasn't particularly nice with the men, but he couldn't get away with it. His problem was and is women. He is a bully, even with men. He's a wimp, he wouldn't stand up against a man, in case one of them stood up to him and floored him. ... I think he probably had a very dominant mother, and he takes it out on all women. Because I've heard him speak to his wife, and he speaks to her as though she's a piece of dirt as well.

Sarah (and her co-worker, Lucy), therefore, may have been chosen for particularly severe workplace bullying because they are women and, the architect hypothesises, women are less likely than men to retaliate with physical violence. Sarah's suggestion that the architect's bullying of women may be an act of revenge against his dominant mother is consistent with studies of the motivations of men who rape women. Scully and Marolla (1985, following Black, 1983) report that 'collective liability' (i.e. holding all people in a particular category responsible for the conduct of one of their counterparts) often accounts for seemingly random violence. This may apply to other aggressive acts.

The men who were bullied by men experienced a form of feminisation (see also Chapter 4). The theft of his design ideas, which prevented David from performing his job competently, not only undermined his professional position in the organisation, but - because skill and masculinity are linked (Cockburn, 1983) - it undermined him as a man. These aspects of professional identity and their importance for David were underlined by the way in which he brought a number of photographs of machinery he had designed to his interview with me. He sought to prove that he was capable of achieving technological advances. Dennis's experiences of workplace bullying are also underpinned by the interplay between organisational position and masculinity. It may be argued that his managing director was intimidated because the qualities of physical strength and endurance accrue to manual work (Cockburn, 1983:135-6) rather than managerial work.

While these cases involved male bullies, two other informants, Gill and Hannah were bullied by women line managers. This may seem surprising, given that gender and organisations literature often refers to ‘female’ management style (e.g. being ‘caring’ and ‘collaborative’, as opposed to ‘male’ management style, which is often defined as ‘directive’ and ‘aggressive’). Wajcman (1996), however, argues that there is no such thing as ‘female’ management style. She states that there are powerful organisational imperatives (e.g. ‘downsizing’) that dictate management style and goals which allow for few substantial modifications in management approach (Wajcman, 1996:345-6). Wajcman’s conclusion is that ‘you can’t take the “man” out of management’ - women adapt and survive by being more male than the men (Wajcman, 1996:345-6). As such, it is unsurprising that Gill and Hannah’s line managers failed to exhibit any stereotypically ‘female’ qualities in their interactions with these two workers. Gill’s headteacher, for example, had been recruited by the school governors in order to discipline staff. Not being seen to be doing so could have resulted in her own dismissal. When women occupy line management positions, therefore, they may have quite a tenuous grasp on organisational power.

While management may, then, be gendered male even when it is performed by women, Hannah’s account of the early years co-ordinator’s actions shows that workplace bullying tactics deployed by women bullies can be underpinned by shared female gender identity. Hannah’s female bully drew significantly on their shared gender identity in order to bully Hannah in a way which she found extremely distressing:

[The co-ordinator] would shout at me in front of the children. Even the children said, 'We don't have to do what you say'. They're very streetwise, they picked up on it. I offered to read a story, she said no, and then told the children that I wouldn't read one. She was belittling me in front of the children. If a child fell over, she wouldn't let me comfort them. She would take the child off me and take them away. A child was doing something wrong, I told her not to do it, I told her three times and the teacher sat at the side ignoring it. I went across to the child and she threw some books on the floor. I said, 'Pick them up and put them back'. The child said, 'I don't have to'. I said to the co-ordinator, 'Would you please tell her to put the books back'. The co-ordinator walked across and gave the child a love and said, 'You'll do it for me won't you, because you love me'. This led to me being frightened by the children. One of them kicked me and she gave him a sweet.

The co-ordinator is considerably less experienced than Hannah. Her newness in the school means that she is not yet an established favourite with the children. Therefore, she has to work at becoming an established favourite with them. She seeks to do this by deploying very maternal behaviour towards the children in order to gain their affection at Hannah's expense. She undermines Hannah not just as a worker, but as a woman. This section, then, has begun to reveal the gender dynamics involved in managerial/professional and subordinate employees' experiences of workplace bullying. This theme will be explored in even more detail in Chapter 7.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the dynamics of experiences which are currently described as 'workplace bullying' and has shown how the interplay between the social relations of professional/managerial and subordinate jobs and leadership succession/despotism influence the character of employees' experiences of this form of workplace harassment.

The accounts analysed here reveal that workplace bullying can often be interpreted as a campaign designed to culminate in the unwanted employee's dismissal, redundancy, early retirement or resignation. As such, the campaign cannot be derailed by the victim, either by compliance, complaint or compromise. Compliance means that the campaign continues unchecked. Complaint merely positions the bullied employee as a whinger. Compromise is ineffective because the bullying line manager does not seek an amicable resolution to the problem. The stages of workplace bullying initiated against an unwanted employee by a line manager/managing director have been revealed as an initial range of catalysts followed by a series of bullying tactics - including a decisive moment after which the employee's departure becomes imminent.

From my evidence, the workplace bullying experiences of managerial/professional employees are precipitated by an interplay between a line manager's dislike of an employee's personality or personal circumstances and a line manager's dislike of an employee as a professional. Professional workers bullied by new brooms encounter a succession of allegations designed to prove their professional incompetence so that they

can be dismissed from their jobs. Managerial employees bullied by established despots need not have their incompetence proven. The despot simply decides their incompetence and will sack them if they do not resign first. The workplace bullying experiences of subordinate employees is precipitated by their particular positions in the organisational hierarchies. Subordinate employees bullied by new brooms encounter an erosion of job satisfaction designed to encourage them to resign. After they fail to do so, they are set up for dismissal, early retirement or redundancy. Subordinate employees bullied by despots are bullied as a punishment for stepping out of their place in the organisational hierarchy. If the employee does not respond by leaving, the workplace bullying may intensify (to set the employee up for dismissal) or may continue without any definite intention to set the worker up for dismissal. All workplace bullying victims discussed in this chapter, however, attracted the attention of the workplace bully by stepping out of line in the organisational hierarchy and every one of their accounts culminated with the employee leaving the organisation where they had encountered workplace bullying.

The chapter demonstrates the difficulties workers encounter when they try to take action against workplace bullying. Personnel allies itself with line managers rather than subordinates. The relative ineffectiveness of trade unionism in responding to the experiences encountered by the men and women is apparent. Hannah's trade union representative was unwilling to conceptualise her experiences as 'workplace bullying'. Gill did have trade union representation, but - particularly at the decisive moment in Gill's experience - the representative took a rather naive view of her situation as a

misunderstanding rather than a campaign of workplace bullying intended to result in the dismissal of the employee. The trade union had been de-recognised in David's workplace. Though he had remained in the trade union, he could not secure practical support for his situation. Trade unions were not recognised in Angela and Dennis's organisations. As workplace bullying is a newly discovered form of workplace harassment, the ineffectiveness of trade unionism in the two former cases can, perhaps, be understood as a temporarily unsatisfactory state of affairs which will improve as workplace bullying becomes more widely understood. Non-recognition and de-recognition of trade unions in the latter three cases, however, suggests that in the absence of trade unionism, employers hire and fire at will.

The law is also currently less than helpful. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there is presently no legislation in the UK which specifically deals with workplace bullying. An injunction can be obtained to stop threatened harassment which is likely to cause physical or psychological injury. Bullied employees are much more likely to resign and complain that they have been unfairly constructively dismissed. This is an unsatisfactory remedy for victims who want the offender to be disciplined and want the workplace bullying to stop (IDS, 1996:76.2). This is one reason why none of my 35 interviewees who had experienced workplace bullying took the option of resigning and claiming unfair constructive dismissal. They felt it more prudent to seek alternative employment. Even those employees who did resort to law cannot be said to have gained by it - Sarah's unfair

dismissal claim was unsuccessful and though Gill received a financial settlement her teaching career is over.

The core feature of workplace bullying is that allegations of professional incompetence/poor work performance are used as the means to encourage/force an employee to resign or to set him or her up for the sack. Such allegations, in all six cases, are either groundless or inflated. Workplace bullying is a form of workplace harassment which involves some combination of blatant abuses of power, questionable uses of power, and unprofessional clashes of personalities and perceptions of personal circumstances. This is disguised as poor work performance because while a line manager cannot admit that an employee is no longer required in the organisation because - for example - line manager and employee have experienced a clash of personalities or because the line manager wants to replace existing staff with a team of his/her own choice, a line manager can say that an employee is no longer required in the organisation because his or her work performance is unsatisfactory.

The term 'workplace bullying' does not make all of these dynamics immediately visible. As such, the term does not offer a full interpretation for men and women's experiences (even though 'workplace bullying' is now a widely recognised interpretation). Therefore, it is appropriate to consider whether alternative terms might more adequately capture the dynamics of men's and women's experiences. Of course, I recognise the contested nature of definitions of workplace bullying: as explained in Chapter 5, people with different social

interests are likely to draw the boundaries between types of behaviour differently. Managers, for example, might wish to draw the boundaries narrowly, defining many forms of management pressure on subordinates as legitimate. Subordinates, on the other hand, especially where they are unable to complain in other ways, may wish to widen the boundaries to limit the scope for management pressure. On the basis of my evidence in this chapter, however, I suggest that workplace bullying initiated by a line manager against an unwanted employee might be more fully understood by campaigners as a type of workplace harassment which involves some combination of blatant abuses of power, questionable uses of power, unprofessional clashes of personalities and perceptions of personal circumstances, but which is disguised as poor work performance. However, while ‘abuse of power’ is already sometimes currently employed as an alternative term for ‘workplace bullying’, the six accounts analysed here all illustrate how the term ‘personality clash’ is currently employed to invalidate complaints of workplace bullying. (An employee can, however, be found to have been fairly dismissed by their employer for ‘personality clashes’. For example, in *Gorfin v Distressed Gentlefolks’ Aid Association* [1973] IRLR 290 and *Treganowan v Robert Knee and Co Ltd* [1975] an employee was held to have been fairly dismissed on the grounds of ‘some other substantial reason because ‘personality conflicts [gave] rise to hostility and tension between employees which were beginning to affect detrimentally the employer’s business’ (quoted in Mead, 1994:141).) This chapter has shown that ‘personality clashes’ are often present in workplace bullying situations. Therefore, the term and interpretation ‘personality clash’ should be seen as part

of the dynamics of workplace bullying/abuse of power and not deployed as a way to prove that a situation is not one of workplace bullying/abuse of power.

Chapter Seven

Gendered Workplace Bullying in the Civil Service

Introduction

What are the dynamics of women's and men's experiences of workplace bullying in the context of restructuring? In what ways are such experiences gendered in character? In this chapter, I analyse these research questions through a qualitative exploration of a small number of richly detailed interviews which explore the way in which workplace bullying has developed in the context of new organisational arrangements and management techniques in the Civil Service. While gender dynamics were present in many of my thirty-five interviews with workplace bullying victims, my informants here are three civil servants whose experiences clearly demonstrate a particular way in which gender is part of the workplace bullying of women and men workers.

My interviewees, all specialists (who are recruited in terms of specific jobs which require particular formal qualifications and experience) rather than generalists (recruited according to general and standardised qualifications) who comprise the bulk of the administration group (Fairbrother, 1994:62), told me that their male line managers bullied them partly through the means offered by the recently introduced human resource management technique of staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion. The series of incidents these informants related are all consistent with current conceptualisations of what counts as workplace bullying (see Chapter 5). Two of my informants, however,

interpreted their experiences as workplace bullying only at the point when they received a low box marking at their staff appraisal. This chapter, therefore, explores how the concept of workplace bullying is being taken up in the Civil Service, where the employment relationship is being increasingly individualised.

The interviewees are: Victoria, a project officer who is white, single and aged 50; Harry, a project manager who is white, married, has two children and is aged 54; and Jim, a project officer who is white, married, has two children and is aged 38. They all work in different agencies of the Civil Service, but in order to protect their anonymity I will not specify the agencies where they work.

These three accounts have been chosen for detailed analysis in this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, as outlined in Chapter 1, I disagree with the assertion that workplace bullying is a gender-neutral experience which is, therefore, easily distinguished from workplace sexual harassment (Adams, 1992:10) and I find Field's (1996:45) statement that workplace bullying can involve 'inappropriate remarks about a person's gender' confusing given his positive endorsement (Field, 1996:25 & 112) of Adams's gender-neutrality thesis. While Field (1996:45) has identified inappropriate remarks about a person's gender as an example of workplace bullying, the data produced in this chapter will reveal one perhaps more subtle but equally important way in which workplace bullying is clearly a gendered experience for men and women workers: my informants encountered workplace bullying when they did not conform to their line managers

conceptualisations of ‘appropriate’ gender conduct. While there will, of course, be more ways in which workplace bullying is a gendered experience (e.g. styles of workplace bullying practised by male and female bullies), my analysis in this chapter will clearly demonstrate the implausibility of the gender-neutrality thesis and will begin to question Adams’s (1992:10) separation between workplace bullying and sex discrimination (though as I explained in Chapter 1, my intention is not to conclude that workplace bullying and sexual harassment are indistinguishable). Secondly, as explained in Chapter 5, existing discourses of workplace bullying have linked workplace bullying very closely to the changing nature of work (e.g. restructuring). As I now discuss, the Civil Service and the practice of staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion provides a particularly relevant context in which to analyse this linkage.

Civil Service restructuring

In his study of the state as employer, Fairbrother (1994) explains that in the 1980s successive Conservative governments initiated a major restructuring and re-organisation of state employment (the Civil Service, local government and the national health service) because, it was argued, the state was not organised in an ‘efficient and effective’ way (Fairbrother, 1994:16). Subsequently, the Civil Service has been transformed from a traditional bureaucracy with standardised procedures and terms and conditions of employment to a managerial employer composed of a set of agencies (semi-autonomous managerial units) and small policy making and supervisory departments (Fairbrother, 1994).

The transformation of the Civil Service has involved a move to redraw the boundaries of employment relations, with an increased reliance on different forms of employment, such as temporary and contract work. Policies have been implemented to recast the forms of control and organisation of the labour force in these sectors. The concern to alter the standardised and detailed work routines and patterns characteristic of much of Civil Service work has meant an intensification of work and increased managerial discretion (Fairbrother, 1994:6). There has been a shift from a situation where the power relations between management and workforces were defined in terms of standardised terms and conditions of employment, and hierarchical forms of authority predicated on assumptions that Civil Service workforces and their managements share common understandings and outlooks. Increasingly managerial forms of organisation have been introduced, with managers exercising more authority at lower levels than in the past (Fairbrother, 1994:34).

Performance-related pay

Though Fairbrother (1994:43) reports that there is at present no co-ordinated programme to introduce a human resource management programme (HRM) in the Civil Service (in this context, sets of policies concerned with the introduction of some notion of strategic planning, encouraging a committed and conscientious workforce, flexible work and employment procedures and practices, and a concern with the quality of goods and services (Fairbrother, 1994:43)), performance-related pay schemes have now been

introduced for half a million civil servants (Fairbrother, 1994:43). Performance-related pay is said by the Government to generate employee commitment (Kessler, 1995): 'the Government believes that linking pay to performance is an important and effective way of focusing people's energies and motivating them to achieve those [quality] standards' (*The Citizen's Charter*, 1992:57, cited in Fairbrother, 1994:43). As Waddington and Whiston (1996) note, advocates of management-initiated workplace reform (e.g. performance-related pay) argue that such new approaches indicate a shift in management attitudes away from adversarial relations towards more collaborative arrangements.

However, Waddington and Whiston's (1996) survey of active trade union members (which covers the entire industrial and occupational spectrum of employment in the UK, not just state employment), reveals that changed labour-management practices indicate extended managerial authority, closer control of labour and a pattern of individual grievances which belie a reformed employment relationship (Waddington and Whiston, 1996:149-150). Forty-two per cent of the activists they surveyed placed management attitudes or behaviour among the top three individual grievances (Waddington and Whiston, 1996:169).

Fairbrother (1994:13) reports that in the Civil Service, because the process of change places workers in a different relation to work and employment than was previously the case, workers are now much more likely to confront office managers who have authority to decide issues relating to the organisation of work and deployment of staff. Furthermore,

performance-related pay has recently been included in the emerging workplace bullying discourse (see Chapter 5). Duin (1997:20), for example, in a BBC bullying pamphlet, observes that performance-related pay involving appraisals by managers (which can include subjective judgements about how well people 'fit in') makes workplace bullying likely to occur. Trade unions are now increasingly recognising that workplace bullying often occurs in workplaces where performance-related pay is in operation (e.g. BIFU, 1996:5).

Townley's (1989:105) analysis of selection and appraisal demonstrates that most appraisal systems are viewed as suffering from the unequal standards applied by different appraisers. One particular criticism which can be made of appraisals is that they offer scope for sex discrimination against women. Rubery (1995), who has explored the prospects for gender pay equity under performance-related pay, says that women may feel at a disadvantage in appraisal where the appraiser is likely to be male with masculine values and frames of reference. Thomas (1996), in an analysis of appraisal in universities, explains in the competitive academic culture only those who are willing or able to work at highly intensified work rates have a chance of success. This culture discriminates against women who have domestic commitments.

Thomas notes, however, that men workers can also encounter discrimination in appraisal. She explains that, 'old men in cardigans' (Maddock and Parkin, 1994, cited in Thomas, 1996:153) face the same contempt as women with domestic commitments from the new

breed of 'macho management'. This is suggestive of a desire to cut 'dead wood' from an organisation. However, Collinson and Hearn's (1994:17) hypothesis that performance-related pay, appraisal and evaluation may reflect and reinforce particular masculinities within organisational practices indicates that men as well as women may encounter unfair gender discrimination in appraisals.

This evidence of unfairness in appraisals for performance-related pay and promotion is particularly important given that this practice is now becoming increasingly common. The Workplace Industrial Relations Surveys (see Waddington and Whiston, 1996) showed that by 1990 almost half (45 per cent) of all establishments had a variant of individual incentive pay, and about one-third (34 per cent) operated merit pay schemes (Waddington and Whiston, 1996:153). Townley (1989) reports that changes in the nature of work organisation, in particular the requirement for the greater exercise of discretion, result in a greater emphasis being placed on behaviour control. She explains that with a diminution in the extent to which rules may prescribe the way tasks are performed, the nature of regulation over labour must also change (Townley, 1989:106), 'the emphasis shifts from *formal* rules as to how the work *is* to be done, to *implicit expectations* as to how it *should* be done' (Townley, 1989:103 italics in original). This relies on an internalisation of the organisation's 'goals', which is one of the functions of appraisals (Townley, 1989:103).

The gendered character of workplace bullying

'[The woman who got promoted] always did exactly as she was told, she behaved in the way he expected a woman to behave. She was very compliant and very quiet': Gendered workplace bullying of a woman by a man

Victoria's experiences demonstrate how workplace bullying can emerge through the interaction of the development of managerial discretion and workplace sexism in which a line manager operates with strong notions of what sort of women can work as his subordinates. As Victoria did not conform to her line manager's perceptions of 'appropriate' female workplace conduct, this led to low box markings at her staff appraisals for performance-related pay and promotion.

Victoria was a Grade 4 civil servant who began working in the Civil Service in the 1970s, prior to the restructuring of the Civil Service. She told me that before the restructuring process she had been very happy in the work environment and had enjoyed her job. She had particularly liked the casual management structure and teamworking. Senior management decided which projects to take on and distributed these projects to project teams. They did not then interfere with the work of the department as long as projects were completed successfully. Victoria explained:

No-one was in charge giving instructions to the others. We met informally on a regular basis and collectively produced work. We all contributed equally and learned a great deal from each other. For several years there were only two [project officers in my discipline] in the department. He and I shared whatever discipline-related work needed doing. When he

was away I did his work too. There was no consciousness of grade or special status attached to grades.

While she was still a relative newcomer to the department, Victoria had been appointed as project officer for a specific project. Although she had not felt ready for such a responsibility, she said that she had learned a great deal from it and felt her abilities had been stretched. She had gained experience of developing a computer package, testing software and managing a budget.

Subsequently, the department where Victoria worked was restructured. Additional layers of management were introduced between the director and Victoria's grade. Victoria felt that the restructuring was organised to produce a structure which was recognisably a Civil Service structure, rather than the best structure for the nature of the work in the department. A man at Grade 2 acquired more institutional power when the management structure changed. As I reveal below, this Grade 2's management style was 'entrepreneurial' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994:14), *i.e. he elevated economic efficiency and managerial control at the expense of all other criteria*. He began a process Victoria categorised as 'empire building', in a specifically gendered fashion:

When the management structure was developed such that these extra posts were introduced into the grade above me [Grade 3], all the women were told not to bother to apply, even the ones with a lot of experience. The people he employed were in fact two white males in their sixties who had retired from their companies and just simply wanted a chair to sit in. ...

[The Grade 2] is a very sexist person, but it doesn't take the form of not employing women. He employs women. In fact, within the section virtually all of the technical staff are women. And that's in an industry which is 97 per cent male. His balance is highly suspect! I think we all felt that the reason he employed women was because he liked power over intelligent women.

Victoria explained that she had previously encountered sexism from this Grade 2. She had just returned from a lunch-time aerobics class and he commented, 'I don't really approve of you doing this. It makes you too thin and I like my women with more meat on them'. Victoria made a complaint, but she observed, 'He didn't understand why I reported him. He couldn't understand that that was offensive'. Victoria's complaint may possibly have provided a catalyst for her subsequent experiences of workplace bullying. Perhaps the Grade 2 realised that he would be unable to get away with sexist comments and had to find alternative tactics. This would fit in with Morley's (1996:469) suggestion that men who are sophisticated enough not to use overtly sexual tactics to undermine women may resort to workplace bullying instead.

Victoria did not, however, believe that her experiences of workplace bullying constituted victimisation following her workplace sexism complaint. She mentioned the incident as an illustration of her line manager's sexism, which she believed was an integral part of her workplace bullying experiences. However, while Victoria was concerned to highlight how she was being bullied as a woman, she was equally concerned to demonstrate how she was being bullied as a worker. The interpretation 'workplace bullying' was particularly helpful

in this latter task. Indeed, Victoria's assessment of what was missing from her work life at this time (being treated with respect as a person and a professional; understanding and seeing the value of the work done; having some freedom to make decisions or share in the decision-making process; being part of a team which communicates fully; having the resources to produce work which is of good quality; having an element of learning to sustain mental activity and give a feeling of growth) is clearly consistent with the current definitions of what counts as workplace bullying given in Chapter 5.

The re-organisation of the agency in which the male Grade 2 acquired institutional power formalised the management-worker divide in the gendered form of male management and female workforce which Fairbrother (1994:34) observes is often an outcome of Civil Service restructuring. When the Grade 2 told women not to apply for Grade 3 posts and then immediately appointed two retired men to the jobs, this showed that while the Grade 2 wanted women at Grade 4, he had reservations about employing them at the grade below his own. This would have placed the women too close for comfort. Adams (1992:17) says that a manager may not promote a very able subordinate because of a fear that they might prove more competent and ultimately take over their job. By overlooking a person in this way, the bully can keep them in their place so that they do not come to pose a professional threat. Though it cannot be proved categorically, events are open to the interpretation that this Grade 2 was attempting to make sure that none of his women subordinates represented a threat to his position by not promoting any of them to Grade 3. (As I reveal below, however, Victoria subsequently encountered more bullying partly

because she consistently refused to accept this type of mistreatment.) It can be suggested that the Grade 2 also made sure that he could not be threatened by the new Grade 3s he had to appoint by recruiting retired men (who would, therefore, be unlikely to seek promotion to Grade 2) who were men who, like him, had sexist opinions of women. (The two new Grade 3 men, Victoria discovered, did not approve of 'working women'. They were unlikely to want to assist women Grade 4s in advancing their careers).

The changes in the management structure, outlined above, were accompanied by the introduction of performance-related pay. While Kessler (1995), in an analysis of reward systems, reports that this is intended as a positive measure to generate employee commitment, Victoria said that she had misgivings about the new scheme:

...instead of working as a team, you tend to have to prove yourself as an individual in order to qualify for performance-related pay. ...in order for it to work you've got to have a very clear job structure, you have to have objectives for your work, performance targets - some framework on which you can objectively measure somebody's performance - and that we never had. The Grade 2 was very much in control of the group and would not set any kind of work schedules because he claimed it interfered with his flexibility.

Thus, while the agency had performance-related pay, the Grade 2's management style prevented its adequate implementation. This provides a context in which problems will inevitably arise. (The Grade 2's resistance to setting performance targets need not be

interpreted as idiosyncratic, however, because new working practices will always provoke a level of resistance.)

Victoria's first problems arose when the Grade 2 was seconded to a company for a year. This meant that there should have been a temporary promotion to his Grade 2 job and consequently a temporary promotion to a Grade 3 job. Victoria was the most experienced and longest-serving Grade 4. Under the rules of temporary promotion, she should have been promoted to Grade 3 unless there was a very good reason not to do so. However, the Grade 2 decided not to promote anyone. When Victoria asked why this had happened she was told that:

It was because Tracy, who was one of the other women on the same grade as me but who hadn't been there as long and hadn't had as much experience was on secondment and it wouldn't be fair to her. That was irrelevant, she doesn't even come into the equation. She was very, very good at her job, a very, very nice person, but she was also his favourite. It was not of her doing, she actually disliked being the favourite, she would have done something about it if she could, but she was favoured because she was a yes person. *She always did exactly as she was told, she behaved in the way he expected a woman to behave. She was very compliant and very quiet (italics added).*

The Grade 2's recruitment of two retired men to vacant Grade 3 posts (see above) has already indicated that he did not want women in Grade 3 positions. This suggests that one reason why he did not temporarily promote Victoria is because she is a woman. This

clearly illustrates sex discrimination. As Victoria observed above, however, there was also a second reason why she was not temporarily promoted: in contrast with her female co-worker, she is not the sort of woman her line manager approves of. Victoria's comments suggest that Victoria and Tracy are very different. In particular, Victoria is neither very compliant nor very quiet. For example, she had made a complaint about workplace sexism (see above) and as she had worked in the department prior to the restructuring, she was used to making her own decisions and taking responsibility. Favouritism between women is less easily interpreted as sex discrimination. Indeed, as Victoria's equal opportunities officer observed (see below), unless it could be proved that Victoria had encountered 'sexual harassment', she did not have a case. Victoria's experience of unfairly not being temporarily promoted is, however, a recognised form of workplace bullying (see e.g. FBU and NASUWT policies). In this discourse, the sex of the person whom the Grade 2 had wanted to temporarily promote is immaterial: only the unfairness of the treatment is relevant. Nevertheless, I argue that Victoria's experience of not being temporarily promoted is an instance in which she is being discriminated against not just as a worker (as Adams (1992) would argue) but as a woman worker.

When she was not temporarily promoted, Victoria contacted her trade union. The trade union instigated a mini staff inspection to assess the necessity of a temporary promotion. It concluded that there should be a temporary promotion. The Grade 2 ignored this advice. Subsequently, the trade union wrote to the Grade 2 pointing out that 'one of the Grade 4s has good cause to be extremely dissatisfied about not being temporarily promoted' and

suggesting that the Grade 2 might take ‘this excellent opportunity to broaden the experience of key personnel’. Again, the Grade 2 ignored the trade union’s recommendation. Victoria saw this as demonstrating his determination to keep her at Grade 4. The situation also highlights the complete ineffectiveness of the trade union in countering the unfairness of the Grade 2’s decision.

In the Grade 2’s absence, Victoria encountered problems with the male Grade 3 who was acting in his place. She explained that he had a style of management in which ‘discussion was not welcomed, ideas and initiative were suppressed’ (i.e. authoritarian, in common with the Grade 2). The Grade 3 would instead say ‘I have decided that you will do this, and you will do it because I say so’. Victoria felt that, ‘I had regressed from being trusted with responsibility and being respected to being programmed like a robot’. The Grade 3 asked Victoria to carry out a project. As the department was not computerised, Victoria had to arrange for the data she needed to be supplied in paper copy. This was put out to tender. The company who won the tender said that they would be unable to supply the material straightaway. Victoria realised that they did not see this project as a *high priority*. Indeed, she explained to me that the project did not have a clear rationale. She had asked the Grade 3 for the objective of this work, but ‘such a question was seen as questioning his authority’. Victoria agreed to the proposed date of supply and informed the Grade 3.

Subsequently, however, Victoria had her staff appraisal and received a box 4 (unsatisfactory performance) for not completing this particular project in 50 days. The

Civil Service guidelines state that a box 4 may not be awarded without prior discussion. Yet Victoria had never been advised that her performance had been unsatisfactory. Additionally, Victoria felt that the appraisal had been conducted in a cold and hostile manner. She made an official complaint to personnel. Kessler (1995) reports that the process of appraisal for pay purposes usually forces direct communication between employee and immediate line manager in determining the formalities of the effort-reward bargain, without the intervention of a third party. He says that the process of setting performance criteria and assessing whether they have been met generates a dialogue between subordinate and superordinate, creating a direct bond between them. Victoria's account of her annual staff appraisal, however, fails to illustrate 'communication' or 'dialogue'. Instead, her line manager simply decrees that her performance is unsatisfactory.

In response to Victoria's complaint, the personnel officer wrote to say that, 'Personnel have no locus in what is said on a staff appraisal report. *Our role is to ensure that the report is internally consistent and has been filled in accordance with the guidelines*'. (I noticed, however, that one of the guidelines on the top of the staff appraisal report said, 'You must guard against unfair discrimination'.) Thus, as Townley (1989) reports, the trend towards 'openness' in performance appraisals (i.e. workers being able to read the completed appraisal form and being able to record dissenting opinions) has not been accompanied by moves to improve or widen appeals procedures. Indeed, Victoria's personnel officer even commented verbally that, 'It is my job to support the reporting

officer, even if he is prejudiced!'. Adams (1992:150) advises that where a completed appraisal requires the signature of the boss's immediate superior (or personnel officer), it would be helpful if this person could check through the previous report and then be prepared to make an accurate comparison. Victoria's experience, however, shows that personnel officers may be quite prepared to endorse prejudice. Victoria felt that the aim of awarding a box 4 was to put an unsatisfactory rating on her in the reporting year before a promotion year because 'the Grade 2 did not want anybody close to him who would not always follow his line or would not always do exactly what he wanted'. Victoria's account of her experiences provides ample evidence of active hostility, and thus demonstrates that this is not simply a 'conspiracy theory' on her part.

The Grade 2 returned from secondment. Victoria's department began work on a major project. This project had two sections. Victoria had been told that she would work on one section. However, at the last minute the Grade 2 decided that she should work on the other section. He said that this was because she was 'the best technical writer in the group'. As this contradicted Victoria's box 4 rating, Victoria felt that her performance had been inappropriately appraised. To complete the project, Victoria worked a 14 hour day 7 days a week for 7 weeks. At her next annual report, however, Victoria did not receive credit for being 'the best technical writer in the group' and for doing such a high volume of work. Instead, illustrating the discriminatory potential of the staff appraisal reporting process, the Grade 2 decided that this piece of work did not count. Shortly after this appraisal, one of the male Grade 3s retired. The Grade 2's actions had the result he

desired because as a consequence of her box 4 rating, Victoria was ineligible to apply for promotion. This shows that appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion offers an opportunity for line managers to exercise their discretion in what to some appear to be arbitrary ways (Fairbrother, 1994:68) but which are, in fact, informed by gender prejudices.

The Grade 2's favourite female Grade 4, Tracy, did not want to apply for the Grade 3 vacancy. The Grade 2, however, stood over her and made her fill in an application form for the job. Tracy and a second female applicant were subsequently called for interview. Tracy chose not to attend. Consequently, the job was given to the other interviewee by default. This new Grade 3 did not have any experience in the type of project which the group then had to begin working on. Therefore, the Grade 2 asked Victoria to chair all the meetings and produce the final report. This job had only previously been done by a Grade 2 or 3. Victoria produced the report two weeks ahead of schedule. Instead of receiving credit for this achievement, the Grade 2 told Victoria that during the period she had been doing the work, the work had been reclassified as Grade 4. The Grade 2's actions at this point, then, constitute yet another example of 'how the devolution of decision-making to a local level has meant that managers have been able to exercise hitherto unprecedented discretion on a range of matters' (Fairbrother, 1994:66).

Victoria felt more and more aggrieved that her work commitment was being ignored. She was continuing to challenge her box 4 rating. By this time she had lost over £5,000 in pay

and this had an adverse affect on her pension rights. Her health had begun to suffer. She had sought medical help for clinical depression. Consequently, Victoria decided to apply to work part-time. The Grade 2 objected to this: 'People who work flexible hours are not committed to their jobs'. This indicates that though the Civil Service now encourages part-time working in order to retain experienced workers, line managers do not always support this policy. While the Grade 2 could not, though, prevent Victoria from working part-time, he did say in a memo that he hoped her health would improve 'so that you do not run the risk of getting a less than adequate performance marking in your next annual staff report'. According to the Civil Service guidelines, however, ill-health cannot cause an individual to be marked at box 4. This underlines the discriminatory idiosyncrasies of appraisal criteria.

Next, the new female Grade 3 went on secondment. The Grade 2 took this opportunity to temporarily promote Tracy to Grade 3. Victoria complained that he could not do that, as she had precedence according to the rules. *The Grade 2 commented, 'I can do what I like'*. (The Grade 2 had, in fact, told Tracy that Victoria had turned down the temporary promotion. Tracy felt, therefore, that Victoria had forced her into a job she did not want.) Victoria contacted the equal opportunities officer in personnel. She said that she was quite sympathetic, but:

She couldn't do anything unless it could be clearly demonstrated that it was an issue of sexual harassment on the grounds of gender. And because Tracy - who was the favourite - was also female, she felt that we didn't have a case that we could demonstrate. She said

that he's not discriminating against women as such, he's only discriminating against certain people in favour of other people who are also women. She felt that she was pretty stuck.

The equal opportunities officer's inability to contest the Grade 2's unfair treatment of Victoria, therefore, arises as a result of how sex discrimination is currently defined. Direct sex discrimination currently involves treating a woman less favourably than a man because she is a woman. Indirect sex discrimination currently means conditions which are applied to all, which favour one sex more than the other but which cannot be justified (EOC, 1993). Victoria is a woman being treated less favourably than another woman because she is not the sort of woman her line manager approves of. All the events since Victoria was first passed over for temporary promotion have deepened the sexist Grade 2's disapproval of her. She has consistently challenged her box 4 rating and is, therefore, neither quiet nor compliant. Victoria's experiences clearly demonstrate that the concept of sex discrimination should be extended to cover discrimination against one woman in favour of another woman. (Sex discrimination against a man when it can be argued that another man would not have encountered such treatment will be discussed below.)

One reason for arguing this is because of the generally sexist atmosphere in the office. For instance, another development at this time was that several women Grade 4s returned from maternity leave and requested part-time work. Victoria explained, 'As soon as all that started happening, all subsequent appointments that were made were men!'. This shows, then, the shifting character of the Grade 2's sex and gender discrimination against

women Grade 4 employees. He had, in Victoria's opinion, initially sought to employ women full-time so that he could have power over intelligent women. When the women had children and wanted to work part-time, he decided not to employ women at all. Therefore, the Grade 2's strategy had developed over time from the inclusion of women at the lower end of the hierarchy to the complete exclusion of women at all levels of the hierarchy. This is clearly an example of workplace sexism. As Cockburn (1991) observes, underlying resentment against maternity provision/women returning to work after maternity leave is 'a widespread view that mothers of young children morally ought to stay at home with them, should not attempt to "have their cake and eat it too". "If you want to have babies, go and have babies. If you want to work, work"' (Cockburn, 1991:94). Furthermore, Collinson and Hearn (1994:14) explain that pregnancy and domestic commitments are perceived to challenge and even undermine everyday business practice and the taken-for-granted masculine discourse of control that separates 'public' and 'private' life.

Working part-time, Victoria began a major project. Again, however, she had been given no clear objectives and performance targets. Concerned that this lack of information would result in another box 4 rating and further loss of pay and pension rights, Victoria decided to go to the head of personnel to make a formal complaint. This meant she went over several people's heads, but it did result in the Grade 2 being told to set formal objectives and performance targets. However, the Grade 2 still refused to give her a formal timeframe for the work. Victoria worked out a project assessment and timeframe.

She decided that the project would take 90 days, given that there was only one computer in the department. The Grade 2 did not object to this assessment.

One morning, however, Victoria found that there had been a problem with the computer during the previous afternoon. Her work had been overwritten. The engineers verified the problem was a fault in the computer. Victoria had previously sent the Grade 2 a note to ask about priorities for use of the computer. At this point the Grade 2 accused her of sabotaging the computer (this type of allegation is, again, a form of workplace bullying (e.g. MSF, 1994:7)) writing to her:

Had you yourself asked about some of the problems of using the machine, some of *your* difficulties might not have occurred. Users need to *share* experience and communicate with each other and show flexibility and sympathy in their relationships. I am concerned that you do not appear to be doing this, and have caused us to waste time on matters which it was in your power to address yourself. I expect much more of a Grade 4 professional and I have to say that in this regard your performance is unsatisfactory (*italics in original*).

Victoria was incensed and immediately responded by memo:

The engineer admitted company liability for the problems and malfunctions we had experienced. ... I find your allegation that I have caused others to waste time, and that all the problems are somehow related to my use of the system, is slanderous. As you have chosen to put them in writing, without even discussing the situation with me, I must

request that you retract them in writing. It is unfortunate that you did not discuss this with me, and get your facts correct before you put pen to paper. The accusations which you make are a total fabrication with no foundation in fact.

This interchange clearly illustrates how Victoria's understandable resistance strategy reinforces the Grade 2's dislike of her. Every time he issues a false allegation, she fires off an outraged response which underlines her inability and unwillingness to be quiet and compliant, the sort of woman worker the Grade 2 would approve of.

The clear dislike between Victoria and the Grade 2 might prompt the suggestion that Victoria should have been allocated a new line manager. This course of action was not open, however:

We were technical specialists. Whereas the generalist in the Civil Service moves approximately every 2 years and consequently they are in different jobs and they get different line managers, if there's a problem with a particular line manager *it only lasts a couple of years* and then they get somebody else, *that was never open to us because we were specialists so we were stuck.*

The Grade 2 began to put pressure on Victoria to return to full-time work. This indicates the Grade 2's 'entrepreneurialism' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994), in which men only identify with those who are, for example, willing to work long hours. According to the rules of the Civil Service, however, people can work part-time if they wish. The onus is on

the senior management to prove that the job cannot be done on a part-time basis if they wish to refuse part-time working. The Grade 2 told Victoria that, 'I had to justify being part-time. I had to have some overriding problem which required me to be part-time, because I didn't have a baby'. Victoria sent a note to the Grade 2 in which she argued that staffing problems in the department were not caused by part-time working but were the result of having two staff on secondment.

Subsequently, Victoria had her staff appraisal. The Grade 2 decided that the project Victoria had said would take 90 days should have taken 50 days, but he did not demonstrate how the work could have been completed in this time. He wrote that, 'Victoria does not volunteer to accept responsibilities', 'she demonstrates some reluctance to widen her skills beyond those immediately applicable to the task in hand', 'she is capable of contributing much more than she does' and 'she lacks commitment and drive'. The Grade 2's conclusion was that Victoria was not fitted for promotion. Allegations of under-performance are particularly effective in disrupting men's and women's careers because in situations of low growth, stiff market competition, and scaled-down manpower levels organisations can no longer carry those defined as under-performers (Long, 1986:49 cited by Townley, 1989:99).

Although most of the women Grade 4 part-timers did have babies, the Grade 2 then began pressuring them to return to full-time work. This illustrates Thomas's (1996) point that women with domestic responsibilities lose out in a culture of highly intensified work rates.

The Grade 2 felt that professional people ought to be able to make arrangements for childcare. He did not accept that the women might want to spend some time with their children. The strategy the Grade 2 used to remove part-time workers was the threat of redundancy. Victoria explained:

First of all he tried to say that he was going to shed two half-time posts. He was actually targeting part-time people for redundancy. The trade union came in and said, 'Sorry, you can't do this, if you're going to have a redundancy situation you have got to offer it or ask for volunteers from everybody in that grade'. So he was forced by the rules to put a redundancy notice round, asking for volunteers from everyone in the grade, but he made it absolutely clear verbally that he would not consider any full-timers.

This demonstrates that women Grade 4s were only welcome in the Grade 2's department when they did not have children and were willing and able to conform to a male way of working, i.e. full-time work. *When the women refused to work full-time, because they had children in most cases, the Grade 2 perceives them as unprofessional people whom he does not want to employ.* The Grade 2 is, therefore, consciously seeking not to accommodate motherhood (Cockburn, 1991:92). This is clearly sexist conduct. A number of trade unions (e.g. NASUWT) have included 'intimidation and threats to the vulnerable, particularly pregnant women and those with caring commitments' (NASUWT, 1996:2) in their definitions of what counts as workplace bullying. The Grade 2's redundancy threat is an attempt to bully women workers into conforming to full-time working. The tactic misfired, however. Victoria commented that the Grade 2 was very shocked when he heard

that all the women Grade 4s had written to the pensions office for a quotation of how the redundancy would affect them. This showed the Grade 2 that the whole of his section would be happy to leave. Victoria told me, however, that one of the part-time workers who had been targeted for redundancy had not applied for it because she had three children and an unemployed husband. This woman had, nevertheless, been treated extremely badly by the Grade 2:

She had been denied her job back when she came back off maternity leave and she was given menial tasks to do, like photocopying. That went on for nine or ten months. Then when pressure was put on him to have her back in proper technical work, he decided that she had been out so long that she was now outdated.

This example offers evidence of gendered workplace bullying on the grounds of family responsibilities. (This is a theme which will be further explored below in my analysis of the two male civil servants' experiences.)

Victoria successfully applied for redundancy. She currently works in a less well paid occupation. Though she said she now feels much happier, Victoria stressed that a complete change of career had been the only option for her as a specialist in the Civil Service:

There's basically a two year moratorium on working in the sector that you've worked for in the Civil Service. You can't actually go and work in the private sector because there is a

feeling that you'll take your confidential knowledge with you. So there is a problem with getting another job. So staff turnover is quite low.

This offers one important reason why Civil Service trade unionism must act to combat workplace bullying. The most usual response to workplace bullying is to resign (Adams, 1992:63) and find a new job. This option is clearly not easily open to specialists in the Civil Service. (Though, as Fairbrother (1994:62) citing Drewry and Butcher (1991) points out, generalists are also likely to become immobile because post-entry training and experience often creates a *de facto* condition of specialisation in which workers acquire a familiarity with particular procedures.)

'Managing people, dealing with folks, my view is that you almost take them on like a family':

Gendered workplace bullying of a man by a man

Harry's experiences demonstrate how workplace bullying can emerge when a project manager's paternalistic managerial style clashes with the authoritarian managerial style of his line manager. As Harry did not, therefore, conform to what his line manager perceived as 'appropriate' male workplace conduct, this led to poor appraisals.

Harry, a project manager, proposed a solution to a project. His line manager, a project director, proposed a different solution. Though both solutions were equally valid - Harry's solution was cheaper and the project director's solution avoided certain delays - the project director's solution was chosen. Subsequently, Harry had a serious car accident and

had several months off work. When he returned, his project director was not in the office. The project director's superior asked Harry to explain why the more expensive solution had been chosen rather than the cheaper solution. Harry told me:

The next thing I knew about it was that I was summoned to the project director's office and screamed at, shouted at, fingers waved, tables banged and basically told, 'You will never speak to anybody above me, at all, without my approval, without my knowledge of what you are going to say, and without first clearing that I wish you to say it'.

On this occasion, then, Harry had gone over his line manager's head. As such, the line manager's annoyance, though extreme, is perhaps understandable. This response has, however, to be seen in the context of the line manager's desire for control which Harry explained was a significant part of his management style. One example Harry gave was that the line manager insisted on signing everything. Harry accepted that if an inexperienced person *had been promoted to project manager, then he or she might need* some guidance (excessive scrutiny of employees' work has, however, been identified as a form of workplace bullying (Duin, 1997:16)), but as he was a very experienced project manager he refused to let his line manager sign everything. He intended to carry out his responsibilities, as specified in his contract of employment. He observed, though, that other equally experienced project managers did let the line manager sign everything.

Shortly after the interchange described above, Harry was called in for his staff appraisal. The project director said, 'As far as I am concerned, you are never ever going to be fitted

for promotion. I will not mark you as fitted for promotion, however long you work here'. As Harry was still recovering from injuries sustained in his car accident, 'I thought that I would concentrate on living rather than fighting this, so I let it go'. As Harry had been off work, three months later the process of reporting for the next year began. Harry asked the project director, 'Does the view you expressed about my abilities three months ago still remain?'. The project director confirmed that this was so. Harry asked, therefore, 'What do I have to do to clear this hurdle, to be recommended for promotion, to get a better report, to get a better pay rise?'. Two hours later, however, he had not received any clear guidance, only generalities, 'all wool and fluff and froth'. Harry found this unacceptable. He explained:

When my staff ask me that sort of question, I have to say to them, 'You have not done this, you were late with that, or your performance here is deficient'. You have to have clear, specific items that you can talk to them about. You should talk to them throughout the year, not just in the reporting process.

Appraisal is usually framed as helping the candidate (Austrin, 1994:207) and indeed reporting officers in the Civil Service are expected to give staff guidance on improving their performance. That this did not take place in this instance illustrates another flaw in the staff appraisal report system. One particular criticism which was made at this appraisal was that Harry was not a team player. Harry explained that, in his opinion, this could not be substantiated:

I think I am a team player. Certainly I put a lot of heart and effort into my professional ethics and looking after my team. We were a slightly older group than most of the teams in the office. We had a lot of fun, we had a lot of experience, we had a lot of laughs. I got told off for laughing too much, but we got more out than most, we did most and most of them have been promoted. We were friends as well as working colleagues. Everyone pitched in, whatever level they were. I get things wrong, and when junior members of the team come to me and say, 'You've got this wrong, mate', I take that as a compliment. [The line manager] couldn't get to grips with this familiarity in the group, the fun and games, there were no confrontations. It was beyond his comprehension. ... *Managing people, dealing with folks, my view is that you almost take them on like a family* (italics added).

Harry, then, seemed to be quite paternalistic towards his team of workers. Collinson and Hearn (1994:13) provide an analytical vocabulary of different variants of masculinity which is relevant here. They say that paternalism is a specifically masculine discourse of control, drawing on the familial metaphor of the 'rule of the father' who is authoritative, benevolent, self-disciplined and wise. Paternalists eschew coercion and seek to exercise power by emphasising the moral basis of co-operation, the protective nature of their authority, the importance of personal trust relations and the need for employees both to invest voluntarily in their work task and to identify with the company. On one occasion, the project director advanced the dates of a project, which meant that Harry's staff would have to work on Sundays. Harry objected to this. He said he did not want his team to work on Sundays. He wanted them to have a home life as well as a work life:

I was particularly concerned that one of the people involved, who had a young family, would be travelling from Yorkshire and would have to spend time away from the family at the weekend. I think weekends are for families. I took the view that she should not have to come to work. She appreciated that.

Harry's views about the importance of family life and his conceptualisation of the work team as a family were, however, completely at odds with the project director's perceptions. Harry observed, for example, that the project director often behaved in an unpleasant and uncaring way towards his own wife and children. On one occasion, he had overheard the project director talking to his wife on the telephone to arrange a house removal, 'He was telling her how to manage things and how to do things. ... He treated her like a 10 year old. ... If I'd even thought that about my wife, I'd have been hit!'. The project director had also boasted that when his children were 11 years old, he had stopped their pocket money and told them, 'If you want money, you have to earn it'. Harry told me that, in his opinion, 'At that age, you don't want your kids going out on paper rounds and putting themselves at risk'. These examples are unflattering to the project director, but as Collinson and Hearn (1994:15) point out, men's distance from their domestic concerns and responsibilities is to some extent caused by increasingly unrealistic expectations of corporate cultures. Harry also gave an example of an incident in the workplace which showed the project director's perception of the appropriate relationship between manager and managed:

Women on the administration side in another team had rushed to get draft orders out. They'd worked all weekend for 5 or 6 weekends because there was a demonstrated need to do so. They were struggling to meet the objective. The project director waltzed in one Friday and said, 'You're not going to get this date met'. The equivalent to me said, 'We're doing our best'. He said, 'Well you should get out there and whip your staff a bit harder, tell them to get their finger out. Got to be hard on these people, they're slackers naturally, you have to show managerial skills'. That's totally alien to my culture.

This indicates that the project director is an authoritarian. Collinson and Hearn (1994:13) define this as characterised by an intolerance of dissent or difference, a rejection of dialogue and debate and a preference for coercive power relations based on dictatorial control and unquestioning obedience. They say that 'authoritarianism celebrates brutal and aggressive masculinity; a criterion by which self and others are judged' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994:13). My argument is that the difference in the management styles of Harry and his project director informs the workplace bullying Harry encountered. As Harry is a team player and a caring line manager, i.e. not 'brutal and aggressive' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994:13), his line manager disapproved of him. Harry is not, therefore, just being bullied because of his managerial style. Instead, he is being bullied because his managerial style appears as an 'inappropriate' form of masculinity. Harry is, then, experiencing gendered workplace bullying which is indicative of sex discrimination. Though sex discrimination is generally understood as a woman being treated less favourably than a man because she is a woman, in this instance a man is being treated less favourably than

another man would have been likely to have been treated because he has not conformed to an 'appropriately' masculine managerial style.

However, Collinson and Hearn (1994:17) observe that new managerial initiatives presuppose an entirely different way of managing that may be antithetical to the masculine and hierarchical identities and notions of authority of conventional management. Halford and Savage (1995), in their analysis of restructuring in banking and local government, report that linking management style to the new emphasis on decentralising authority, the ability to empower staff and respond flexibly is displacing the ability to impose fixed bureaucratic rules. I think, therefore, that the line manager's real criticism of Harry is that he is a team player, not that he is not a team player. The line manager perhaps makes this particular criticism because team playing and a caring approach are valued abilities which Harry possesses but which the line manager lacks. Though the line manager's actions do not indicate that he wants to possess Harry's capabilities, he will be aware that he should possess them.

Harry's experiences with his project director made him concerned about what had been written on his annual report. Finally, he rang his friend at the office where annual reports are filed and discovered that his report had been altered. Harry then deliberated about what to do next. He explained to me that:

You're working in an area of fear, because it's money, because it affects your promotion.

... It's very rare that someone is big enough or brave enough to step out of line and say,

‘Hang on, foul!’ I think I’m old enough and big enough to do that. Somebody has to stand up for the system and try and achieve what the system sets out to achieve. ... A number of colleagues in the office came round and said that they’d had their reports altered by the same guy. And although they’d given me comments, they didn’t wish them to go any further because of the fear. That’s sad but perfectly understandable from people who are less experienced in the department, or who are trying to ensure they get on in the future. It should be dealt with because it’s tied to pay, it’s not just a bit of paper that’s outside the employment contract.

Harry challenged his project director, who denied having altered the report. Harry presented him with evidence that the report had been altered, so the project director had to agree that he had done so, ‘Ah, well, yes, I got a bit wound up’. At this point, Harry asked for a transfer to another line manager and his request was allowed. The morning before his interview with me, Harry had finally (a year after the report had been altered) received an apology from his project director. The project director had also agreed to put on file confirmation that the report had been altered and that the process of reporting took place in an environment that was unacceptable as there had been a total breakdown of communications.

Though Harry did say that his trade union had been interested in his case in the context of their negotiations about the new reporting system, his experiences - in common with Victoria’s - illustrate a one-person campaign against unfair staff appraisal reports (my third informant, see below, was not a trade union member). This indicates that workplace

bullying through unfair appraisal is not yet established as a grievance in the Civil Service. Austrin's (1994) analysis of the politics of appraisal and grievance hearings in the New Zealand finance sector, however, shows that trade unions can help workers to contest unfair appraisals. Austrin gives the example of trade union-organised women's seminars in New Zealand in the 1980s in which women shared their experiences of patriarchal exclusion in order to make a collective appraisal of themselves and their employing institutions. The women's narratives opened up the possibility of pursuing personal grievance issues on the grounds of gender discrimination. Austrin observes that the same type of repositioning could be used to open up other issues of relevance to workers (Austrin, 1994:211). This indicates, then, a way in which gendered workplace bullying perpetrated partly through the means offered by staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion could be taken up by Civil Service trade unionism. For as Austrin (1994) observes, new individualised work practices open up new ways for trade unions to resist and organise.

'[The line manager] launched into a tirade of "I don't like the way you conduct your life. In the spare time you've got, you should spend more time with your children and your wife, not going to the football with your mates and going out drinking"': Gendered workplace bullying of a man by a man

Jim's experiences demonstrate a situation in which work intensification gives rise to heated interchanges on the subject of the 'appropriate' conduct of a committed family

man. Jim is not the sort of man his line manager approves of because he has family responsibilities. This disapproval leads to a low box marking at his staff appraisal.

Jim, a project officer, was transferred to a new job in a project team. The week before he started his job he met his new line manager at a social occasion. The line manager commented, 'When I was told I was going to get you, I said I didn't want you. I don't think you're suitable, but I've got to have you so we'll see how it goes'. He did not elaborate on the reasons for his opinions. Jim told me:

I thought, 'I will prove him wrong, I will work really hard to ensure that a) I get a good report and b) I make him happy and make him realise that he has made a bad mistake in his judgement of me'.

Jim's intention to prove the project manager wrong operated, therefore, on a personal level and in relation to the specific context of staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion. He wanted the line manager to see that he was a good worker and he needed a good report in order to achieve a satisfactory box rating. In the week when Jim began the job the project manager's car broke down and Jim offered him a lift to work. He observed that at this point 'he really was nice'. At work, however, (paralleling Victoria), Jim discovered that there was a very intensive workload and the work was very badly defined. One day, the project manager asked if Jim would work late to finish a particular job:

We worked from seven in the morning to seven at night without a break at all. We ate while we worked. The other men didn't seem to be as committed to the project as I was. I thought that this would stand me in better stead because I thought that he would see me in a better light, that I was prepared to do things, despite having young children.

Rubery (1995:650) observes that under performance-related pay employees may feel obliged to strive to achieve their performance target whatever the time requirements. She says that the issue of time may be even more important in assessment based on more qualitative criteria such as attitude, co-operativeness and commitment. Here the requirement may not only be to work whatever hours are necessary to meet individual targets but also to be willing to work extra and longer hours whenever necessary to solve particular problems and bottlenecks that may arise. Rubery comments that long hours have gender implications in that they reduce opportunities for women to integrate into the labour market. My data, however, shows that performance-related pay also has significant gender implications for men. Jim feels that he has to work long hours on this occasion in order to prove that he is a hard worker. Halford and Savage (1995) report that new managerialism is linked to a new form of organisational masculinity. Men are expected to work long hours, and home life is subsumed to careers and male sociability. Importantly, however, Jim said that he would have preferred to have been at home with his wife and children rather than remaining late at work. This contests any idea that men easily subsume their home life to careers. Furthermore, the emerging workplace bullying discourse recognises that 'the ever increasing demand for greater effort and longer hours' (NATFHE, 1996:1) is a manifestation of workplace bullying. As such, then, scope is now

emerging to contest work intensification and, perhaps, the notion that men's home lives should be subsumed to careers and male sociability.

Jim hoped that by staying late on the particular occasion described above he had begun to establish his reputation as a hard worker. Several days later, though, Jim received a telephone call at home from a co-worker to tell him he was 'in for the high jump in the morning'. That day Jim had had an extended lunch hour. He had said to the project manager that he would make it up. The project manager thought he meant that he would stay late that night, whereas Jim had meant that he would stay late later in the week. When Jim went into work the next day the project manager called him in to his private office:

He launched into a tirade of *'I don't like the way you conduct your life. In the spare time you've got, you should spend more time with your children and your wife, not going to the football with your mates and going out drinking'*. I said, 'How I conduct my life outside here has got nothing to do with you'. He then told me about what a fantastic father he was, and how I should buy a caravan like he did and take my kids for holidays. Basically he did a very good appraisal of himself, and was pointing out what he thought was bad about my personal character as he saw it, which I didn't go much on (italics added).

When Jim said that his home life was not the concern of the project manager, the project manager told him, 'If you carry on talking to me like this, I'll bury you'. Jim told me that he was not physically frightened of the project manager - who was twenty years older and

much shorter than him - but he was frightened of what he could do to his staff appraisal. (Jim was not a member of a trade union so he could not seek trade union assistance.) Jim had, then, taken Adams' (1992:60) advice to 'stand firm if you come under verbal attack. Tell the bully that you will not tolerate personal remarks' (Adams does not mean confrontation, which she says is 'more likely to enrage than to persuade' (Adams, 1992:58). Instead, 'standing firm' is offered as a tactic to try at the beginning of workplace bullying experiences) but had felt thwarted by the discriminatory potential of staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion. Later in the day the manager apologised. He said he had been under strain at work.

This disagreement appears to have arisen because of differences the line manager thinks he has perceived between his version of masculinity and Jim's version of masculinity: Jim is a man's man (football supporter and pub-goer who does not spend enough time with his family) and therefore not the sort of man *his line manager approves of*, while the line manager, in contrast, is a family man (caravanning holidays with his children) and thus is the 'right' sort of man. (Jim was concerned to point out, however, that the line manager's assessment of him as a man who is always at the pub or at a football match was incorrect. He goes to a football match once every two weeks.) This reading of Jim's experiences, however, is complicated by subsequent events.

A month after the incident described above, Jim's wife rang him at work to say that water was pouring from the sink in the bathroom. Jim went home to sort this out. When he came

back one of his co-workers told him that the project manager had been 'going bananas' while he was away and had asked, 'Hasn't that cunt come back yet?'. Jim objected to this by telling the project manager:

I don't like being spoken about like that behind my back. You knew I had a problem. I don't think it's fair to leave a wife and young children in a situation with water pouring all over the floor.

Jim had two days off to deal with the plumbing problem at home. When he returned the project manager observed, 'I thought you were loyal, but you're not'. This is a significant aspect of Jim's experiences of workplace bullying. Kanter (1977:15) reports that organisations say to workers, 'While you are here, you will act as though you have no other loyalties, no other life'. Collinson and Hearn (1994:18) explain that individuals are frequently evaluated in organisations according to their ability to control their lives by retaining a separation between 'home' and 'work'. Jim's inability and unwillingness to relinquish his family loyalties was further underlined for his line manager by an incident which arose shortly after the problems described above. Jim's wife had been in hospital for an operation. When she was discharged, Jim wanted to take an afternoon off to take her home. The project manager said:

'Couldn't your father-in-law do that?'. I said, 'Of course not. I want to fetch her'. Then it was a case of, 'Oh, it's funny isn't it, you go off watching football and that, but when it suits you you become the doting, loving husband'.

The line manager's assessment of Jim as a drinker/football supporter after he failed to stay late at work and his responses to two subsequent events (the bathroom sink incident and Jim's afternoon off collecting his wife from hospital) seem to indicate that Jim is being bullied not just because he is a man's man in contrast with his line manager who is a family man. This is evident because if the line manager was categorising Jim as the sort of man he disapproves of because he goes out drinking and watching football rather than going on caravanning holidays with his children, then Jim's arguments that he could not leave his wife and children in the house with water pouring from the sink and that he wanted to collect his wife from hospital would have positioned him as the sort of man his line manager would approve of - i.e. a family man like the line manager. Instead, it appears that *whatever* Jim does makes him the sort of man his line manager disapproves of. This is confusing at first glance.

I argue, however, that the key to all three incidents is the interaction between work intensification and the line manager's conceptualisation of the 'appropriate' conduct of a committed family man. The first workplace bullying incident recorded above arose after Jim did not immediately make up the time lost when he had an extended lunch hour. As the line manager had assumed that he would stay late on the same day as he had had the extended lunch hour, his failure to do so constructed him as a 'shirker' leaving work early in order to go to the pub, for example. Nichols and Beynon (1977) explain that working long/unsocial hours in order to earn more money constructs men as committed family

men. They mention a male factory worker who works all the overtime he can possibly get because, 'he is utterly determined that his children will have a better life than he had' (Nichols and Beynon, 1977:196). Though Jim would not have earned more money by staying late, immediately making up the time lost would have demonstrated a commitment to his job. Work commitment is a key aspect of staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion. This would, then, have constructed Jim as a committed family man who wanted to progress in his career in order to support his family. As he did not make up the time immediately, Jim's line manager (who perceived himself as a committed family man) began to think that he was the sort of man he should disapprove of. The sort of man he would approve of would stay at work as long as possible in order to demonstrate his commitment to his family and when he did go home he would do so in order to participate in important events, such as caravanning holidays. The bathroom sink incident and Jim's afternoon off collecting his wife from hospital firmly convince his line manager that Jim is not the sort of man he approves of because they are instances in which Jim goes home instead of staying at work and does so for reasons that the line manager perceives as insignificant (e.g. a leaking sink). Jim is, therefore, not the sort of man the line manager approves of as a worker and as a husband/father. This workplace bullying is clearly gendered: a man who the line manager had seen as the sort of man he approved of would have been unlikely to have encountered personal insults. Though sex discrimination is generally understood as a woman being treated less favourably than a man because she is a woman, in this instance a man is being treated less favourably than another man would

have been likely to have been treated because he has not conformed to 'appropriate' masculine conduct.

The project manager's next move was to force Jim to work overtime on a football match day. Civil Service managers do have the option of forcing overtime on weekends, but they take this option extremely rarely. It can be argued, therefore, that the line manager's decision to force Jim to work overtime was informed by his perception that as Jim wastes his leisure time on frivolous pursuits, his leisure time should be cut short. The timing and tone of this demand incensed Jim so much that when he discovered that his faulty office telephone had not been fixed, he smashed it up. Though the project manager was in the next office, he did not come out to find out what was going on. Jim went out of the office and when he returned a brand-new telephone was installed on his desk. A co-worker commented that, '[The line manager] thinks he's pushed you too far, and he's a bit frightened that you're going to have a go at him physically'. Jim told me that he would not have attacked the project manager because it would have meant instant dismissal. This meant he was denied one form of retaliation which might be open to some men - but not many women - in some occupations. However, Jim did feel (to some extent wrongly) that he could engage in psychological retaliation:

I'm into football ... I know doctors, even policemen off duty, who got involved in [football hooliganism]... I made him aware that it would be a pleasure for me to actually sort of do him over, which he didn't go much on as you can imagine. But having said that, he was starting at this time to say, 'We'll see what sort of report you're going to get'. ... I

considered that I was the one out of the team that was working the hardest, the others were sucking up, 'Oh, have a cup of tea'. Sometimes I'd be working away and the other lot - including him - would be talking about all these other things and I'd be the only one doing any work. I didn't think he'd be that unprofessional to give me a bad report.

The threat reported above seems to show that Jim was, at this point, bullying the bully. This does not appear, at first glance, to be a very acceptable resistance strategy. However, it has to be remembered that workplace bullying victims almost always have 'murderous feelings' (Adams, 1992:63) towards the person who bullied them, which they do not act upon.

Subsequently, Jim was pleased to hear that he was to be transferred back to his previous job because his former line manager had discovered that he needed one extra person in his team and wanted Jim. Jim and his co-workers had their annual staff appraisals shortly after Jim received this good news. The men compared reports, although strictly speaking they are not meant to do so, and Jim discovered that he had got the worst report. He was awarded a box 3b. Unlike Victoria's line manager, Jim's project manager did not go as far as awarding a box 4 without warning (he was clearly more concerned to stay within the rules than Victoria's line manager). Nevertheless, Jim considered that the assessment was unfair. His co-workers agreed. They said that they accepted that Jim worked harder than they did. This demonstrates that even though Jim was not a trade union member and could not therefore command collective action against unfairness, he did have access to an informal type of collective action in which co-workers broke the rules by comparing box

markings. When Jim discovered that he had the lowest marking and his co-workers agreed that this was unjust, this gave Jim the confidence to complain. Such informal collective action is an important part of resistance in many organisations. McKinlay and Taylor (1996), in a study of the impact of HRM techniques, for example, report that workers in a non-unionised greenfield microelectronics plant came to the conclusion that the practice of peer review drained individual and team confidence, was intimidating, and created and/or sharpened tensions in teams. As a result, they decided to subvert the surveillance and disciplinary aspects of peer review by tacitly trading monthly scores (though informal pressures did continue to be applied to any recalcitrant team member) (McKinlay and Taylor, 1996:293-294).

As the Civil Service has an open reporting system, Jim had the option of putting a note in his report to disagree with the assessment. He went to see the senior project officer (his line manager's superior) and said, 'Unless you change the report, this enclosure is going in there'. Jim told me that he had leaned menacingly across the desk, though when the senior project officer asked if he was threatening him he merely responded that it was a fact that he would do this rather than a threat. The senior project officer called Jim's line manager in to see him and the next day all the points in the report were retracted. Jim's performance was uprated to box 3a, except for his grading for 'reliability under pressure'. He had told the senior project officer about the telephone incident. As Jim knew he would get a good report in his next job and because it only meant a loss of £500, he did not pursue the issue further even though he felt that this particular grading was unfair. Jim's

success in having his performance uprated suggests that Adams' (1992:150) advice that where a completed appraisal requires the signature of the boss's immediate superior (or personnel officer), it would be helpful if this person could check through the previous report and then be prepared to make an accurate comparison can sometimes be followed. Nevertheless, it is plausible to suggest that Jim's menacing attitude towards the senior project officer had an effect on this retraction and uprating. As explained above, Victoria had strenuously objected to her box 4 rating but never succeeded in overturning the decision. A woman leaning menacingly over a desk does not have the same impact as a man doing so. At his next appraisal in his new job, Jim received a box 2b rating. He felt, therefore, that his previous 3b rating 'highlights where the system can fall down'.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the gender dynamics of workplace bullying in the specific work context of the Civil Service, where the employment relationship is being increasingly individualised. In contrast with the incremental process of workplace bullying perpetrated by new brooms and established despots (see Chapter 6), the annual staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion is clearly the key event in which Civil Service line managers bully subordinates. Jim interpreted all his experiences as workplace bullying but was particularly shocked when his line manager awarded him a low box marking. The types of events that Victoria and Harry encountered (e.g. Victoria's blocked temporary promotion; Harry's line manager's fury when he 'went over his head') before they

received low box markings are all examples of how workplace bullying is currently conceptualised. However, I argue that these two civil servants interpreted their experiences as ‘workplace bullying’ at the point when they received an unfairly low box rating. Victoria and Harry structured their retrospective accounts of workplace bullying around their annual staff appraisals for performance-related pay and promotion. This, then, illustrates how the concept of workplace bullying is being deployed by civil servants in conditions of changing management policies in order to interpret grievances. Unfairly low box markings are taken as examples of workplace bullying when employees think back and interpret these markings in the light of earlier examples of unfairness. There is, then, optimism that the workplace bullying discourse might soon provide a way to contest low box ratings which recipients perceive to be unfair.

There is no compelling evidence that the civil servants I interviewed were being explicitly set up for dismissal (unlike many of the workers whose accounts were analysed in Chapter 6). Instead, following Austrin (1994:207), who comments that appraisals are ‘a major component of the disciplinary power that human resource management deploys’, I argue that line managers are using appraisal to try to keep women and men workers in their places as subordinates. My evidence of line manager misuse of appraisal supports Waddington and Whiston’s (1996) conclusion that changed labour-management practices indicate extended managerial authority rather than worker empowerment. Victoria, Harry and Jim had all demonstrated that they were not unfit for promotion. Their low box ratings were, therefore, clearly unfair. It would not, however, be appropriate to demonise the line

managers who awarded these low box ratings. Jim's account shows how work intensification in the Civil Service may cause line managers to bully men and women who have family commitments. Harry's account demonstrates how the possession of a capability - team-work - which is now valued in staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion can prompt bullying from a line manager who appears to lack this capability.

This chapter has sought to problematise the gender-neutrality of the current workplace bullying discourse. I have drawn out one particular way in which men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying are gendered in character. (There will, of course, be more ways in which workplace bullying is a gendered experience for men and women workers, which may be revealed by qualitative analyses of particular employment contexts.) In the Civil Service, Victoria's, Jim's and Harry's line managers' conceptualisations of 'appropriate' ways of being a man or woman at work and at home (this latter category is particularly pertinent to the men's experiences) *inform their* engagement in workplace bullying. Victoria is not the sort of woman her line manager approves of because she is neither compliant nor quiet. Jim and Harry are not the sort of men their line managers approve of because of their family commitments and familial relationships with co-workers respectively. The prominence of 'family' in Jim's and Harry's accounts also demonstrates that not all men are prepared to 'invest in displaying a distance from the domestic sphere' (Collinson and Hearn, 1994:18).

I have, therefore, demonstrated that although Adams (1992) and Field (1996) are correct to say that workplace bullying is not necessarily sex-specific because it can be experienced and perpetrated by men and women (even though most bullies are, in fact, men (Leymann, 1992, cited in Hoel, 1997) if only because more men than women attain positions of authority in organisations), this should not unproblematically be taken to mean that workplace bullying is a gender-neutral experience which is clearly distinct from sex discrimination. Following Kitzinger (1994), I argue that women's and men's experiences of workplace bullying are not simply structured by sex discrimination in the sense of two additive forms of harassment (sex discrimination against men/women and bullying of gender-neutral workers), because 'oppressions are not additive, but interactive' (Kitzinger, 1994:133), but that workplace bullying - which has been clearly defined as involving specific forms of unfairness (see e.g. MSF, 1994, 1995) - can be a gendered experience for men and women workers. This, therefore, makes significant challenges to the gender-neutrality of workplace bullying thesis and the distinctive nature of workplace bullying thesis without challenging the specificity of workplace bullying as a type of harassment based on allegations of poor work performance.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis has analysed men's and women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment and bullying. In this final chapter, I summarise my conclusions regarding the five main analytical themes of the preceding chapters: (i) women's definitions of unwanted male sexual conduct at work; (ii) men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment; (iii) the social construction of workplace bullying; (iv) the salience of organisational position to workplace bullying; and (v) the gendered character of workplace bullying. I demonstrate how my conclusions to these five main analytical themes inform the argument of my thesis.

My thesis argument, as outlined in Chapter 1, is that the workplace bullying discourse which has emerged in the UK in the 1990s and the workplace sexual harassment discourse which has been developing in the UK since the 1980s can usefully be brought together. Yet while a fruitful dialogue between the two discourses might suggest that men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment could be conceptualised together as instances of 'workplace abuse of power', this would obscure the visibility and specificities of women's experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct, men's experiences of male/female-perpetrated sexual allegations (i.e. sexual harassment) and women's and men's experiences of unfair allegations of professional incompetence/poor work performance (i.e. workplace bullying): 'workplace bullying' very

effectively highlights the unfairness of allegations of poor work performance and ‘sexual harassment’ very clearly demonstrates the unfairness of gender prejudice.

Therefore, I propose conceptualising men’s and women’s experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment as a continuum in order to highlight the similarities and differences between these experiences. I have explored a number of continua in this thesis, which can be broadly categorised into three themes: (i) the continua between types of workplace harassment; (ii) the continua between men’s and women’s experiences of types of workplace harassment; and (iii) the continua between persistent and/or serious workplace harassment experiences and single incident and/or more ‘low key’ workplace harassment. The concept of the continuum allows a recognition that all the experiences analysed share a basic common character: one person is exercising power in ways which does harm to another person. Yet the concept of the continuum also permits a realisation that to remain at the very abstract level of such a generic characterisation does not take us far enough. As such, this concept shows that we need to see both the generic common denominator and the specific variants of power and harm involved in types of workplace harassment.

Women’s definitions of unwanted male sexual conduct at work

As explained in Chapter 1, the term and interpretation ‘sexual harassment’ came to the UK from the US in approximately 1981. Statistical surveys, which revealed the prevalence

of sexual harassment in local government, were conducted by NALGO. As such, media interest was aroused: in October 1981 a television documentary (*TV Eye*) on workplace sexual harassment was broadcast. Subsequently, guidelines on workplace sexual harassment were presented by EPOC at the annual conference of the Institute of Personnel Managers. NCCL issued a pamphlet on the topic of workplace sexual harassment in 1982 (all cited in Wise and Stanley, 1987:30-31). These events allowed women workers in the UK to start to understand their experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct as 'sexual harassment' and thus as conduct which is incontrovertibly unacceptable because it undermines the status of women as workers.

However, in the 1990s, Brant and Too (1994:1-2), in the introduction to an edited collection entitled *Rethinking Sexual Harassment*, tentatively asked whether the language of sexual harassment has gone as far as it can or in the direction that it should. They said that confusion about what is meant by 'sexual harassment' comes from those sympathetic to the issue as well as those hostile to it: charges of exaggeration, over-simplification, inadequacy or inflexibility can be made by feminists who find the available discourse not always helpful in describing experiences of sexual harassment. Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:8), it will be remembered, have been more overtly pessimistic. Although they believe that a significant achievement of second wave feminism was to single out sexual harassment as a part of women's personal everyday experience and to give it a political definition and name, they claim that many women and men have never accepted the feminist redefinition of women's experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct as 'sexual

harassment'. Furthermore, Thomas and Kitzinger (1997:7) explain that we are now experiencing a backlash against feminism: for example, spokespersons for this anti-feminist backlash (e.g. Roiphe, 1994) are trying to redefine most experiences that women may define as 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life'.

My interviews with seven women who have experienced incidents which they understood as sexual harassment (Chapter 3) suggest that Thomas and Kitzinger's (1997:8) assertion that 'most women refuse to define their experiences as sexual harassment' can be cautiously challenged, even though I cannot directly refute their argument. For my qualitative data demonstrated that significant numbers of women have embraced the vocabulary of sexual harassment. Most of the women with whom I spoke did not hesitate in interpreting some experiences as sexual harassment. A clear recognition of the relevance of the sexual harassment discourse to many women's lives offers a way in which to strengthen this discourse against the anti-feminist backlash which wants women to redefine most 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life'.

Nevertheless, I have expressed concern in Chapter 3 that many feminists perceive 'sexual harassment' as the only meaningful way in which to condemn and combat unwanted male sexual conduct at work and that, as such, women's alternative ways of understanding unwanted male sexual conduct at work are not currently respected (except by Epstein, 1996, who suggests 'sexist harassment' as an interpretation of unwanted male conduct which women do not perceive to be 'sexual'). My argument is that women's

understandings of their own experiences must matter. When women do not interpret their experiences as 'sexual harassment', but instead refer to incidents which could be defined as 'sexual harassment' as 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment', this need not always be perceived as an indication that the women see these experiences as unproblematical. Instead, the women I interviewed did recognise sexual harassment, but sought to make distinctions between sexual harassment, sexism and sexualised/sexist environments on the grounds of, for example, whether or not they perceived a given incident as an indication of unreciprocated male sexual interest.

The most important aspect of experiences which women did not label as 'sexual harassment', however, was that the women were saying that these experiences were unwelcome. The concept of the continuum is able to register that women's experiences of 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment' are unacceptable examples of unwanted male sexual conduct, even though they do not involve perhaps the most widely understood type of unwanted male sexual conduct, i.e. a man harassing a woman for sex. For the concept of the continuum can make clear that 'sexual harassment', 'sexism', and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment' have a basic common character: men are exercising power in ways which does harm to women. This means that women's experiences of sexism, for example, need not necessarily be conceptualised as less serious than women's experiences of sexual harassment. In another context, Kelly (1988:74) explains that the range of male behaviour which her women interviewees defined as abusive was not reflected in legal codes or in the analytical categories used in previous

research. As such, she says that the concept of the continuum can enable women to make sense of their own experiences by showing how 'typical' and 'aberrant' male behaviour shade into one another (Kelly, 1988:75). I believe that the workplace sexual harassment discourse must include terms such as 'sexism' and 'working in a sexualised/sexist environment' because these are definitions and distinctions which women find useful in their everyday lives.

There is no reason why new definitions for types of unacceptable conduct cannot be established. For example, Chapters 5-7 have demonstrated that many increasingly unacceptable features of the social relations of work have been reinterpreted as 'workplace bullying' in the UK in the 1990s. The existence of a range of terms for unwanted male sexual conduct rather than just one term will enable more women to recognise and perhaps challenge unwelcome experiences. Otherwise, if feminists continue to encourage women to interpret all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment and some women do not want to do so, there is a danger that they may feel encouraged to accept any experience which they do not interpret as 'sexual harassment' as 'just part of everyday life', in the way advocated by anti-feminist backlash spokespersons. Alternatively, women may interpret experiences which involve unwanted male sexual or sexist conduct as 'workplace bullying' because they do not see these experiences as sexual harassment and do not possess any widely accepted alternative terminology with which to name such experiences. This is problematical because if an experience does involve

unwanted male sexual or sexist conduct it ought to be named as such in order to highlight its unacceptability.

Men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment

The rethinking sexual harassment debate exemplified above by Brant and Too (1994) and Thomas and Kitinger (1997) demonstrates that feminist analyses of women's experiences of sexual harassment are constantly developing. Most feminists, however, have still not recognised the workplace sexual harassment of heterosexual men by men or women - although Epstein (1996) has analysed the harassment of gay men and men perceived to be gay/effeminate. Nevertheless, it will be remembered that men's experiences of male-perpetrated 'ridicule' have been highlighted by Holland et al (1990:128), in a discussion of data produced in the Men, Risk and AIDS project. They reported that when young men talk amongst themselves about their sexual exploits, they are competing to be defined as 'real men'. Men whose sexual claims are not believed are ridiculed as 'wimps', 'wallies' and 'wankers' (Holland et al, 1990:132).

My argument, as outlined in Chapter 1, is that particularly in the context of the anti-feminist backlash (see above), feminists must begin to think creatively about how analyses of 'sexual harassment' can be developed and strengthened. One way in which I believe that this may be done is by problematising dominant feminist thinking which often says that heterosexual men can never be sexually harassed by heterosexual women or men (e.g. Herbert, 1992) or which at best gives only cursory mention of male-experienced

workplace sexual harassment (e.g. Stanko, 1988:94; Thomas, 1997:131). If feminists do not make this intervention into the men and masculinities debate, then men will remain wrongly defined as always oppressors and never victims and as such, they may be potential supporters of the anti-feminist backlash. Male workplace harassment victims have already been recognised by the workplace bullying discourse. Consequently, the workplace bullying discourse has not been threatened by the anti-feminist backlash. I stress, however, that recognising men's experiences of sexual harassment does not mean making a challenge to the statistical prevalence and political importance of highlighting men's sexual harassment of women. Indeed, the IPD survey (1995) (reported in the *City Centre Newsletter*, 1995) suggests that many fewer men than women encounter workplace sexual harassment.

In Chapter 4, I took up these issues in my discussion of two heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. Clearly, 'sexual harassment' is not an automatic interpretation for men's experiences of harassment at work, but the term highlights the gendered and sexual character of the conduct my informants encountered. These aspects of the men's experiences would have been much less visible if termed as 'workplace bullying', given the presently dominant idea that workplace bullying is non-sexual conduct in which aspects of the victim's identity are either irrelevant or incidental. My informants' experiences demonstrated that sexual allegations have a distinctive place in heterosexual men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment. Sexual allegations are rarely central in women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment (Chapter 3), so in

this sense this type of workplace sexual harassment was shown to be gendered male. As it is known that certain men do rape women and sexually abuse their children and because all men are expected to be good sexual performers, all men are vulnerable to allegations of rape, child abuse and poor sexual performance. The men's experiences of sexual allegations showed that the workplace sexual harassment of men by men or women is underpinned by a restrictive discourse of 'acceptable' masculinity which constructs certain individuals as less than the ideal of masculinity when they do not behave in particular ways.

The workplace sexual harassment of men in the form of verbal sexual allegations feminises those men who find such allegations distressing. Therefore, while the centrality of sexual allegations distinguishes men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment from women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment, men's and women's experiences of workplace sexual harassment share a basic common character of gender prejudice. The concept of the continuum is, therefore, able to register that men's experiences of workplace sexual harassment are unacceptable, even though they do not involve the most widely understood type of workplace sexual harassment, i.e. a man harassing a woman. The concept of the continuum can, nevertheless, also acknowledge that the sexual harassment of women by men always involves at least the potential for rape, as does - though this may figure less centrally in male victims' minds - the sexual harassment of men by men, but that the sexual harassment of men by women is very unlikely to contain this threat.

The social construction of workplace bullying

As evidenced by the preceding two sections, the central focus of the workplace harassment discourse which has been developing in the UK since the 1980s is the social category of the *person* (e.g. their sex) experiencing particular types of *behaviour* (e.g. sexual propositions). This left a gap in the workplace harassment discourse: prior to the early 1990s there was no term and interpretation in the UK for workplace harassment which the recipient did not immediately perceive to be directly related to an aspect of his/her identity (e.g. sex or 'race').

The workplace bullying discourse has now provided a term and interpretation for workplace harassment which the recipient does not immediately perceive to be directly related to an aspect of his/her identity. '*Workplace bullying*' migrated to the UK from Scandinavian countries in the early 1990s as an interpretation of persistent, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions which makes the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, which undermines their self-confidence and which may cause them to suffer stress (MSF, 1995). As explained in Chapter 5, 'workplace bullying' has subsequently been established as an important type of workplace harassment by self-help psychology/social issues texts, newspaper articles, television and radio programmes, trade union policies, publications and conference reports. For example, Radio 4 broadcast two radio programmes in 1992 -

An Abuse of Power and *Whose Fault Is It Anyway?* The producer of these programmes then received a high volume of telephone calls and letters from bullied workers. At this juncture the Staffordshire University workplace bullying survey played an important role in establishing that workplace bullying is a widespread experience, beyond the confines of the initial respondents to the radio programmes.

My analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrated that ‘workplace bullying’ offers men and women workers a helpful interpretation for a range of unfair practices which were not previously theorised as types of workplace harassment but were instead commonly perceived as inevitable parts of the social relations of work, for example: setting objectives with impossible deadlines; removing areas of responsibility and giving people menial or trivial tasks to do instead; taking credit for other people’s ideas; ignoring or excluding an individual by talking only to a third party to isolate another; withholding information; spreading malicious rumours; constantly undervaluing effort; and persistent criticism (MSF, 1994).

Though I stressed the importance of the workplace bullying discourse in Chapter 5, it will be remembered that I also argued that the current emphasis on persistence and/or ‘sledgehammer’ experiences is restrictive. The sexual harassment discourse has shown that sexual harassment may be a single incident and may occur in the form of a ‘dripping tap’ as well as being a ‘sledgehammer’ (Wise and Stanley, 1987). Wise and Stanley explained that most sexual harassment is ‘small, mundane and accumulating; and it permeates our

lives' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:114). They argued that it is crucially important to name the 'dripping tap' behaviours, events and situations as sexual harassment: by doing so we recognise that they are important and common, rather than trite and confined to 'just me' and my 'peculiarities', and we see them as limiting, oppressive and ethically wrong political behaviours because they attempt to disempower us. Out of this we come to see that 'politics' is about power, influence and control, and can be located in the most humdrum and supposedly 'insignificant' of things. In addition, by seeing sexual harassment in political terms, we begin to recognise similarities between 'the men who do' and 'the men who don't' (Wise and Stanley, 1987:114). I have suggested that the workplace bullying discourse should join the workplace sexual harassment discourse in recognising 'dripping tap' and single-incident experiences. These types of workplace bullying need to be widely understood in order for the range of workplace bullying incidents to be named in everyday life as well as in campaigning and research. As previously mentioned, Kelly (1988:74) has argued that the concept of the continuum can enable victims to make sense of experiences which are not reflected in legal codes or in the analytical categories used in previous research, by showing how 'typical' and 'aberrant' behaviour shade into one another (Kelly, 1988:75).

A number of my informants in Chapter 5 were indeed beginning to adapt the workplace bullying discourse to their own circumstances (e.g. by defining single incidents and irritating events as workplace bullying). These experiences were 'workplace bullying' in the sense that they were consistent with the MSF (1995) definition of workplace bullying

(see above), even though they did not fit in with the way 'workplace bullying' has been defined as a persistent 'sledgehammer'. Therefore, a particular incident of arguably 'low key' workplace bullying, persistent 'dripping tap' workplace bullying, one-off 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying and persistent 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying are a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished at the borders of these phenomena. The concept of the continuum highlights a basic common character of these experiences: one person is exercising power in ways which does harm to another person. Thus, the concept of the continuum shows that single incidents and irritating events are as important to combat as persistent 'sledgehammer' experiences.

The salience of organisational position to workplace bullying

Chapter 5 highlighted the importance of *single incidents and irritating events*, but I recognise that a single incident/irritating event may not lead to the loss of the victim's livelihood. This was the outcome experienced by the majority of my informants: they had encountered incremental and escalating campaigns of workplace bullying by a line manager/managing director which culminated in dismissal, redundancy, early retirement or resignation. The concept of the continuum is able to register this difference between persistent and/or serious workplace bullying and single incident and/or arguably more 'low-key' workplace bullying, without implying that one type of workplace bullying is more important than another.

Chapter 6 demonstrated that the stages of workplace bullying initiated against an unwanted employee by a bullying line manager/managing director are an initial range of catalysts (e.g. a line manager's dislike of an employee's personality) followed by a series of bullying tactics (see MSF, 1994, above) - including a decisive moment (e.g. the victim making an official complaint) after which the employee's departure becomes imminent. My analysis revealed that the core feature of workplace bullying is that groundless or inflated allegations of professional incompetence/poor work performance are used as the means to encourage/force an employee to resign or to set him or her up for dismissal.

I argued that workplace bullying is a form of workplace harassment which involves blatant abuses of power, questionable uses of power, and unprofessional clashes of personalities and perceptions of personal circumstances. This is disguised by the language of poor work performance because while a line manager/managing director cannot admit that an employee is no longer required in the organisation because - for example - the line manager/managing director wants to replace existing staff with a team of his/her own choice, a line manager/managing director can say that an employee is no longer required in the organisation because his or her work performance is unsatisfactory. The term 'workplace bullying' does not make all of these dynamics immediately visible. As such, the term does not offer a full interpretation for men and women's experiences (even though 'workplace bullying' is now a widely recognised interpretation). Women's non-labelling of unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment because they were not 'harassed for

sex' (see Chapter 3) indicates that interpretations of workplace harassment should make clear the dynamics of experiences covered by the term. I suggested, then, that the type of workplace bullying analysed in Chapter 6 might be better understood by campaigners as a form of workplace harassment which involves 'abuses and questionable uses of power' and 'clashes of personalities/perceptions of personal circumstances', but which is disguised by the language of 'poor work performance'. Thus one aspect of my analysis was the exploration of how bullies sought to appeal to criteria of work performance to legitimate their unfair exercise of power. Another theme was that 'personality clashes' were often involved in the process of workplace bullying, but that this had different implications from those often claimed. For while this terminology is often currently employed to seek to invalidate complaints of workplace bullying, this was unjustified in my examples because these 'personality clashes' were bound up with the unwarranted exercise of power. Thus it is important to locate both the invocation of 'poor work performance' and manifestations of 'personality clashes' as elements of the abuse of power which constitutes workplace bullying.

As the bulk of Chapter 6 focused on how workers are bullied as workers rather than as gendered individuals, this might have been taken to imply my agreement with previous commentators (e.g. Adams, 1992) that abuse of organisational power - rather than gender prejudice - is *the* structuring process of workplace bullying. I explained, however, that following Acker (1991:157), I argue that organisational hierarchies and class relations are constructed through gender and such class relations are always gendered. It will be

remembered that Acker (1991:170), exploring the theory of gendered organisations, said that in organisational logic, jobs have no occupants, no human bodies and no gender. An abstract job can exist, can be transformed into a concrete instance, only if there is a worker. In organisational logic, filling the abstract job is a disembodied worker who exists only for the work. Such a hypothetical worker cannot have other imperatives of existence that impinge upon the job. There is no place within the disembodied job or the gender-neutral organisation for other 'bodied' processes, such as human reproduction or the free expression of emotions (Acker, 1991:173). The subordinate employees discussed in Chapter 6 were indeed initially perceived by their line managers merely as workers employed to perform particular jobs. The workplace bullying, however, escalated when their line managers became aware of the workers' personalities and professional competencies. The professional/managerial employees perhaps encountered workplace bullying because their personal lives intruded into their organisational lives: e.g. through illness, divorce and bereavement. All these 'illegitimate' intrusions made these men and women appear to be unsuitable for their jobs. As such, Chapter 6 demonstrated that line managers do often want disembodied workers who exist only for the work. Yet while this evidence suggested that these workers' line managers wanted an impersonal bureaucracy, their relationship with their employees was, in fact, not impersonal but personal and thus gendered. Gender was shown to be embedded in organisations: for example, a process of gendering which was particularly apparent in two accounts was that men occupied more senior positions than women in organisational hierarchies and deployed their organisational power in a way which highlights male dominance of women.

Gendered workplace bullying

The relevance of gender in workers' experiences of workplace bullying was explored in even more detail in Chapter 7. In this chapter, I analysed men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying in the specific work context of the Civil Service, where the employment relationship is being increasingly individualised. In contrast with the incremental process of workplace bullying discussed in Chapter 6, the annual staff appraisal for performance-related pay and promotion was clearly the key event in which Civil Service line managers bullied subordinates. Unfairly low box markings at these appraisals were taken as examples of workplace bullying when employees thought back and interpreted these markings in the light of earlier examples of unfairness. There was no compelling evidence that the civil servants I interviewed were being explicitly set up for dismissal (unlike many of the workers whose accounts were analysed in Chapter 6). Instead, following Austrin (1994:207), who comments that appraisals are 'a major component of the disciplinary power that human resource management deploys', I argued that line managers used appraisal to try to keep women and men workers in their places as subordinates.

While Chapter 6 demonstrated how workplace bullying is gendered because gender is embedded in organisations, in Chapter 7 I sought to make a more substantial challenge to the gender-neutrality thesis proposed by Adams (1992). It will be remembered that Adams said that workplace bullying is not sex discrimination. To illustrate her point, she cited the

case of a woman employee bullied by a male line manager and then observed that a man who had previously worked for the same male line manager had also been bullied by him. Adams was concerned to stress, though, that 'as the stories in this book unfold, you will discover that female bullies are no less vitriolic' (Adams, 1992:10-11). Though Adams is correct to say that workplace bullying is not necessarily sex-specific because it can be experienced and perpetrated by men and women, I stressed that this should not unproblematically be taken to mean that workplace bullying is a gender-neutral experience entirely distinct from sex discrimination.

I demonstrated one way in which men's and women's experiences of male-perpetrated workplace bullying are clearly gendered in character. (There will, of course, be more ways in which workplace bullying is a gendered experience for men and women workers, though these remain to be explored by future qualitative analyses.) My analysis revealed that men and women workers can encounter workplace bullying from prejudiced line managers because they do not appear to conform to normatively defined gender roles. The victims then experience such workplace bullying as *an attack on them as men or women* not just as workers. I argued that a recognition of the gendered nature of many men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying necessitates a change in the way sex discrimination is conceptualised. Direct sex discrimination currently involves treating a woman less favourably than a man because she is a woman. Indirect sex discrimination currently means conditions which are applied to all, which favour one sex more than the other but which cannot be justified (EOC, 1993). These current conceptualisations of sex

discrimination do not capture the forms of sex discrimination I found in my research. The men and women whose experiences were discussed in Chapter 7 were being treated less favourably than another woman or man would have been treated as a result of the prejudices of male line managers.

This recognition of sex discrimination in women's and men's experiences of workplace bullying highlights a basic common character of gender prejudice in men's and women's experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment, which then seem to be a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and cannot be readily distinguished at the borders of these phenomena. As will be remembered from Chapter 1, some previous commentators have found it difficult to decide whether or not workplace bullying and sexual harassment should be conceptualised together or separately. As a result, Annabel (1997:126) has argued that it is unimportant how experiences are defined: the common thread running through types of workplace harassment is abuse of power. Therefore, 'why should it really matter what the reason is for the humiliations people suffer at work? ...Harassment and bullying are cut from the same piece of cloth as far as the person on the receiving end is concerned' (Annabel, 1997:126). This is an argument which is helpful in campaigning against all types of workplace harassment, but it is not an argument which gives sufficient analytical leverage on the specifics of these social phenomena.

I would disagree with any analytical suggestion that workplace bullying and sexual harassment are so similar that they do not merit specific naming. Though my analysis of workplace bullying illuminated ways in which the concept of sex discrimination might be extended, I did not seek to reclassify workplace bullying as a type of sex discrimination. This is because I believe that it is important to retain the specificities of types of workplace harassment: 'workplace bullying' very effectively highlights the unfairness of allegations of poor work performance and terms such as 'sex discrimination', 'sexism' and 'sexual harassment' very effectively demonstrate the unfairness of gender prejudice. This does not, however, mean that aspects of the victim's identity (e.g. gender) can be ignored in analyses of workplace bullying, for as Kitzinger (1994:132) rightly states 'we are harassed as whole people: we don't ever stop being all of whom we are'.

This recognition of the salience of identity in workplace bullying and sexual harassment, however, raises the question of how to distinguish gendered workplace bullying and sexual harassment. My answer, as I have argued throughout this thesis, is that men's and women's own interpretations of their experiences must matter: if a man wishes to highlight his oppression primarily as a worker, he may decide to say that he has been bullied; and if a woman wishes to stress her oppression as a woman, she may decide to say that she has been sexually harassed. For as Kitzinger (1994:132) argues, with regard to the question of whether a black lesbian should stress her experiences of racism or anti-lesbianism, the emphasis she chooses may depend on her audience and her intentions. With black heterosexual women, it may be necessary to speak of anti-lesbianism in order that they

notice her oppression as a lesbian; with white lesbians, it may be necessary to speak of racism, in order that they notice her oppression as a black woman. If, on the other hand, she wants emotional support and empathetic understanding, she may choose to emphasise the oppression she shares with her audience.

This thesis has demonstrated that the emergence of workplace bullying in the UK not only deserves analysis in its own right but also offers new directions for workplace harassment research. Many forms of cross-sex and same-sex workplace interaction can now be problematised. I have made a number of interventions into the debate, but there is clearly further work to be done. For example, as explained in Chapter 2, my informants were mostly white, heterosexual, non-disabled, white-collar workers who were members of particular trade unions. Therefore, future research should explore those work contexts which are absent from my study and interrogate the roles of 'race', sexual orientation and disability in workplace bullying.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that although the workplace sexual harassment discourse remains relevant to women workers, it is limited because: (i) 'sexual harassment' is being defined by many feminists as the only way to condemn unwanted male sexual conduct; and (ii) heterosexual men's experiences of sexual harassment by men or women are being routinely ignored or given only cursory mention in feminist research.

Equally, while I have demonstrated that the workplace bullying discourse offers a helpful interpretation of a range of non-sexual experiences which women and men workers previously understood as inevitable parts of the social relations of work, I have argued that it is limited because: (i) persistence and 'sledgehammer' experiences are being presented as the defining features of workplace bullying; and (ii) the gendered character of workplace bullying has been denied.

I have proposed that the workplace bullying and sexual harassment discourses can inform each other in four ways in order to address the above mentioned limitations and thus deepen feminist analyses of the injustices women and men now encounter at work. Firstly, the emergence of 'workplace bullying' demonstrates that new interpretations of types of unacceptable conduct can be successfully introduced. Therefore, women do not need to define all unwanted male sexual conduct as sexual harassment in order to condemn such experiences. My interviews show that women use a range of terms to problematise unwanted male sexual conduct, which must now be taken seriously by feminists. Equally, as new interpretations of unacceptable conduct can be successfully introduced, the workplace bullying discourse must place 'personality clashes' in the context of the dynamics of power, so that 'personality clashes' are not used to invalidate complaints of workplace bullying. Secondly, the workplace bullying discourse stresses that men as well as women encounter victimisation. This clear recognition of the workplace victimisation of men suggests that men cannot be ignored in sexual harassment research and indeed my data reveals how heterosexual men are sexually harassed at work when they fail to

conform to ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Thirdly, sexual harassment researchers insist that single incidents and ‘dripping tap’ experiences are as politically important as persistence and ‘sledgehammer’ experiences. As such, the workplace bullying discourse must also problematise the emphasis on persistence and ‘sledgehammer’ experiences. My interviews show that workers are indeed just beginning to adapt this discourse to their own circumstances (e.g. by defining single incidents and irritating events as workplace bullying). Finally, gender dynamics have always been central to feminist analyses of sexual harassment. If the social relations of gender are power relations, then these will also be present in bullying situations. Indeed, my interviews have shown that workers often feel that they have been bullied not just as workers but as men and women.

While this fruitful dialogue might suggest that men’s and women’s experiences of workplace bullying and sexual harassment could be conceptualised together as examples of ‘workplace abuse of power’, I have argued that the specificities of women’s experiences of unwanted male sexual conduct, men’s experiences of male/female-perpetrated sexual allegations (i.e. workplace sexual harassment) and workers’ experiences of unfair allegations of poor work performance (i.e. workplace bullying) must remain visible. Therefore, I have proposed that the concept of the continuum offers a way in which to recognise the similarities and differences between men’s and women’s experiences of workplace sexual harassment, sexism, working in a sexualised environment, a single incident of arguably ‘low key’ workplace bullying, persistent ‘dripping tap’

workplace bullying, one-off 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying and recurrent 'sledgehammer' workplace bullying.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

SECTION 1 - WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Are you experiencing harassment or bullying:-

Now

☐ Or in the past (if so, please specify when it took place) _____

(Please note that though the questionnaire is written in the present tense I am interested both in hearing about situations which are currently taking place and those which took place in the past).

Could you tell me about your experience of harassment / bullying? *(Please focus on one experience of harassment / bullying - perhaps the most recent or the experience that bothered you most. If you have further experiences to tell me about, I am also very keen to hear about them - perhaps you could write about them on a separate piece of paper and return it with the questionnaire?).*

[illegible]

Below I have given a list of *some* different aspects of harassment / bullying. Could you tell me which of these categories comes closest to describing the experience you have outlined above? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary).

- ☐ Sexist jokes / comments
- ☐ Staring
- ☐ Touching
- ☐ Pressure for sex
- ☐ Assault
- ☐ Removing your responsibility / giving you menial tasks to carry out
- ☐ Setting objectives with impossible deadlines / setting you up to fail
- ☐ Criticism / shouting / pressure / undervaluing your efforts
- ☐ Ostracism / Isolation
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

If you were to put a label on your experience, how would you term it? (you may tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Sexual harassment by a man / men
- ☐ Sexual harassment by a woman / women
- ☐ Sexism
- ☐ Bullying by a woman / women
- ☐ Bullying by a man / men
- ☐ Bullying by both women and men
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Was the harassment / bullying:-

- ☐ One incident
- ☐ A series of incidents

SECTION 2 - WHERE IS THIS HAPPENING?

What activity is the workplace engaged in? (e.g. if it is a factory, what is made there?)

Is the workplace:-

- ☐ A publicly-owned enterprise
- ☐ Or a privately-owned enterprise

Is the workplace:-

- ☐ Unionised
☐ Not unionised

Where in the workplace / and outside the workplace does the harassment take place?

If the harassment goes on inside the workplace, is this area of the workplace:-

- ☐ Open plan
☐ Divided into separate sections

Does the harassment take place:-

- ☐ In public
☐ In private

Roughly how many people work in area of the workplace where the harassment is taking place?

Does this area of the workplace contain:-

- ☐ More women than men
☐ More men than women
☐ A mixture of women and men
☐ Mainly young workers
☐ Mainly older workers
☐ A mixture of ages

Overall, is this area of the workplace:-

- ☐ Friendly
☐ Unfriendly
☐ Neither particularly friendly or unfriendly

What jobs are people in this area of the workplace doing?

What is your job in this workplace, and what does your job involve?

Is your job:-

- ☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time
☐ Permanent
☐ Temporary

How long had you been employed in the workplace before the harassment began?

Are you still working in this workplace, and how long have you stayed in the job since the harassment began?

SECTION 3 - WHO CARRIES OUT THE HARASSMENT / BULLYING?

How many harasser(s) are there?

Is the harasser(s) :-

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Both men and women

Do you think there is a ringleader?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If so, is this person:-

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

What job does the harasser(s) do, and what does the job involve?

Is the job done by the harasser(s):-

(please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time
☐ Permanent
☐ Temporary

Compared to you (and the other people affected), what is the work status of the harasser(s)?

- ☐ In an inferior work position to you
☐ In a superior work position to you
☐ Same work status as you
☐ Visitor to workplace/customer
☐ Other (please specify) _____

Could you give the approximate age(s) of the harasser(s)? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ 16 - 20
☐ 21 - 30
☐ 31 - 40
☐ 41 - 50
☐ 51 - 65

Which ethnic group(s) does the harasser(s) belong to?

Do you know the marital status(es) of the harasser(s)? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Single
☐ Married
☐ Living with partner
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed
☐ Don't know

Do you know (roughly) the highest educational qualifications the harasser(s) have? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Vocational qualification
☐ O level / GCSE / CSE
☐ A level
☐ Degree
☐ Postgraduate qualification
☐ Other (please specify) _____
☐ Don't know

Roughly how long had the harasser(s) been employed in the workplace before the harassment began?

Is the harasser(s) still employed in the workplace, and how long have the harasser(s) been employed in the workplace since the harassment started?

As far as you know, does the harasser(s) have a reputation for harassment?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If the harasser does have a reputation for harassment, can you outline this reputation?

How have you found out about the reputation?

Has the harasser(s) told you why he / she is behaving like this towards you?

Do you have any theories about why the harasser(s) is harassing you?

How did you feel about the harasser(s) before the harassment ?

How do you feel about the harasser(s) now?

Has anyone encouraged the harasser(s)'s behaviour, either through their comments or actions, and if so what did they do or say?

SECTION 4 - ARE OTHER PEOPLE AFFECTED?

Are you the only person affected by this harassment?

- ☐ Yes (*if yes, please go to section 5*)
☐ No

How many other people are being affected by this harasser / bully?

Is it possible to say whether more of these people are male or female?

Are their jobs:-

(please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time
☐ Permanent
☐ Temporary

Which ethnic group(s) do the other people belong to?

Approximately how old are the other people? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ 16 - 20
☐ 21 - 30
☐ 31 - 40
☐ 41 - 50
☐ 51 - 65

Do you know the marital status(es) of the other people? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Single
☐ Married
☐ Living with partner
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed
☐ Don't know

Do you know (roughly) the highest qualification the other people have? (please tick as many boxes as is necessary)

- ☐ Vocational qualification
☐ O level / GCSE / CSE
☐ A level
☐ Degree
☐ Postgraduate qualification
☐ Other (please specify) _____
☐ Don't know

What jobs do the other people do, and what do their jobs involve?

How long had the other people been employed in the workplace before the harassment started?

Are these people still employed in the workplace, and how long have they stayed in the workplace since the harassment began?

What have you and the other people involved said to each other about this situation?

SECTION 5 - ARE THERE ANY WAYS TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION?

Does this workplace have an equal opportunities policy?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

Does this workplace have a policy on harassment / abuse of power?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If yes, what does the policy say?

If there is a policy on harassment in the workplace, were you aware of it before your situation arose?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

How did you find out about the harassment policy?

What attempts have you made to avoid the harassment (e.g. by avoiding the harasser), and how helpful have these strategies been?

Have you told anyone at work that you are being harassed?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If no, can you explain why you have not done so?

If you have told someone, who have you told?

- ☐ Someone in a superior work position to your own
☐ Someone in an inferior work position to your own
☐ Someone with the same work status as your own
☐ Someone else (please specify) _____

What is his / her job, and what does the job involve?

Is his / her job:-

- ☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time
☐ Permanent
☐ Temporary

What is his / her age?

- ☐ 16 - 20
☐ 21 - 30
☐ 31 - 40
☐ 41 - 50
☐ 51 - 65

What is his / her marital status?

- ☐ Single
☐ Married
☐ Living with partner
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

☐ Don't know

Which ethnic group does this person belong to?

Why did you choose this person to tell, what did you tell them, and what has their response been?

Has anyone challenged the harasser in *any* way?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, who?

☐ You

☐ Someone else

If you challenged the harasser, what did you do and why did you do it?

If you did not challenge the harasser, why have you not done so? *(this question is not meant to imply that you **should** have challenged the harasser, instead I just want to know why people may feel unable to object to harassing behaviours).*

If someone else challenged the harasser, can you give me some further details about them? Were they:-

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Both males and females

What was his / her job, and what did the job involve?

Was his / her job:-

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Permanent
- ☐ Temporary

Was he / she:-

- ☐ In a superior work position to you
- ☐ In an inferior work position to you
- ☐ Same work status as you

- ☐ In a superior work position to the harasser
- ☐ In an inferior work position to the harasser
- ☐ Same work status as the harasser

- ☐ A trade union or staff association representative
- ☐ Someone who does not work at the workplace (please specify who) _____

What is his / her age?

- ☐ 16 - 20
- ☐ 21 - 30
- ☐ 31 - 40
- ☐ 41 - 50
- ☐ 51 - 65

What is his / her marital status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Living with partner
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Don't know

Which ethnic group does this person belong to?

Why do you think this person challenged the harasser(s)?

What did this person do, and how did the harasser(s) respond to their objections?

If someone else challenged the harasser(s), how did you feel about someone else intervening?

Have other workers made any comments about you or someone else intervening against harassment, and if so what comments have they made?

Do you think the intervention has had any positive consequences?

Do you think the intervention has had any negative consequences?

After the harasser(s) was challenged, do you think that he / she has changed his / her behaviour in *any* way, and if so can you explain how it has changed?

Have you told anyone outside the workplace that you are being harassed / bullied at work, if yes who have you told, and how helpful has that been; and if no why have you not told anyone?

Do you belong to a trade union or staff association?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, which trade union / staff association do you belong to?

Have you approached the trade union / staff association for advice?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, what was the trade union / staff association response; and if no, why have you not contacted them?

Have you contacted the Equal Opportunities Commission, or any other organisation (please specify which organisation) about your situation, and if so what has their response been?

Has any action (either formal or informal) been taken against the harasser / bully?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don't know

If no, do you have any ideas about why no action has been taken against the harasser(s) / why he or she continues to get away with it?

If action has been taken against the harasser, how has it been taken?

- ☐ Informally
☐ Through grievance procedure
☐ Through an industrial tribunal

Can you tell me what happened (what action was taken, and by whom)?

What was the outcome of this action?

- ☐ No outcome
- ☐ Harasser(s) given an informal warning and stayed in job
☐ Harasser(s) transferred to another department
☐ Harasser(s) resigned
☐ Harasser(s) sacked
- ☐ You were given an informal warning but stayed in your job
☐ You were transferred to another department
☐ You resigned
☐ You were sacked
- ☐ Other (please specify)

Have you been satisfied by the action that has been taken?

If the outcome was not satisfactory to you, what would you have preferred to happen?

Do you have any thoughts about how to improve the process of dealing with harassment claims?

SECTION 6 - EFFECTS OF HARASSMENT

How has the harassment / bullying affected you (and other people involved) whilst it has been happening?

Have there been long-term effects of being harassed / bullied?

SECTION 7 - DEFINITIONS *(In addition to the specific details of your own experiences, I am also interested in how people define harassment and bullying. It would be most helpful if you could give me some idea of how - in general terms - you would define different forms of harassment at work).*

In general terms, how would you describe 'sexual harassment'?

In your opinion, is sexism different from sexual harassment, and if so how?

In general terms, how would you describe 'bullying' at work?

Do you think 'sexual harassment' is different from 'bullying', and if so can you explain how it differs?

Do you think that the definition of harassment at work should be broadened, and if so what experiences would you like to see included?

How do you feel about being referred to as a 'victim' of harassment at work? Is there a term that you prefer?

SECTION 8 - BACKGROUND QUESTIONS *(So that I can put your answers in some context, I would be grateful if you could fill in this section of background questions. As with the rest of the questionnaire, this information will be treated in the strictest confidence).*

Are you:-

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

Which ethnic group do you belong to?

- ☐ White
☐ Black-Caribbean
☐ Black-African
☐ Black-Other
 (please describe) _____
☐ Indian
☐ Pakistani
☐ Bangladeshi
☐ Chinese
☐ Any other ethnic group
 (please describe) _____

How old are you?

- ☐ 16 - 20
☐ 21 - 30
☐ 31 - 40
☐ 41 - 50
☐ 51 - 65

What is your marital status?

- ☐ Single
☐ Married
☐ Living with partner
☐ Separated
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

How many dependent children do you have?

What is the highest educational qualification that you have?

- ☐ Vocational qualification
- ☐ O level / GCSE / CSE
- ☐ A level
- ☐ Degree
- ☐ Postgraduate qualification
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Could you give me a rough idea of your earnings?

- ☐ Between 1,000 and 5,000 pounds per annum
- ☐ Between 5,001 and 10,000 pounds per annum
- ☐ Between 10,001 and 15,000 pounds per annum
- ☐ Between 15,001 and 20,000 pounds per annum
- ☐ Between 20,001 and 30,000 pounds per annum
- ☐ Above 30,001 pounds per annum

Thank you very much for filling in this questionnaire. Please return it in the pre-paid envelope to: Deborah Lee, Sociology Department, University of Warwick, Coventry. CV4 7AL.

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